

S E R M O N S

L. Langhorne Preached before the 1767

HONOURABLE SOCIETY

O F

L I N C O L N ' s - I N N .

By JOHN LANGHORNE, D.D.

Rector of Blagdon, Somersetshire.

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And I am not to be taken for granted
that I am not to be taken for granted
that I am not to be taken for granted

I am not to be taken for granted
that I am not to be taken for granted

GOAL TAYLOR

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S E R M O N XIII.

The Evangelical Charity.

I COR. xiii. 4, 5.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind: Charity envieth not: Charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly,

WHATEVER arguments have been brought against the several outward circumstances, and relations of facts in the history of the christian religion, the force of it's internal evidence could never be denied. It's enemies the most avowed have been obliged to acknowledge that the moral spirit and ten-

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dency of it's precepts imply a more enlarged benevolence, and a more exalted virtue, than any single adventurer in the regions of philosophy was ever able to strike out.

It has been allowed, indeed, by a christian writer*, that the collective virtues of the several philosophic systems might make up a body of evangelical morality; but, though this might be true, of what consequence to mankind in general, were those fragments of moral doctrines that lay scattered thro' a variety of facts; unembodied for the direction of universal practice, and unenforced by any supreme authority?

* Lactantius.

Whatever

Whatever the friends of natural religion may assert, mere speculative truths, discovered by the human mind, will strike but feebly upon the heart. It is necessary as well to believe that the precepts we follow are of divine origin, as to know them accompanied with sanctions of the highest importance.

Upon this foundation stand the interests of the christian religion. A most exalted system of morality, formed and embodied by the wisdom of God, recommends itself to our practice, not only by it's own amiable and intrinsic excellence, but by the most interesting sanctions that can possibly appeal to our passions or desires. Our love of life is flattered with the prospect of immor-

talities, and our desire of happiness is gratified by promises of the most exalted and invariable felicity.

Motives, however, less powerful than these, might, one should think, induce us to obey the precepts of a religion that breathes so benevolent, so delightful a spirit!

Were the charity, here described by the apostle, universally prevalent, how infinitely greater and more secure would be the social happiness of mankind.

That disorder in the commerce of society which arises from the too ready indulgence of anger and resentment, would then be no more; for

I. Charity suffereth long.

In

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5

In this state of error and frailty, where the best of human beings has many faults, has much to be borne with, and much to be forgiven, this disposition of long-suffering charity is indispensibly necessary for our common peace.—Weak and imperfect creatures as we are, shall we indulge the peevishness of hasty censure? Shall we give ourselves up to cruel and precipitate judgments on what, at first sight, bears the appearance of a fault?—Surely, if we are of such a spirit, we are destitute of that charity, without which the apostle declares, that all other properties shall profit us nothing.

The charitable person suffereth long. The genius and precepts of his religion teach him, what the truth of philosophy

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and reason likewise approve, to bear with the frailties of his fellow-creatures.

He who is hasty to determine upon the conduct and the principles of others, will often form injurious conclusions, and judgments always, at least, uncharitable. Many circumstances there are which, upon a superficial view, may have the appearance of vice, of impropriety, or of folly; but which, were we made sufficiently acquainted with the causes that produced, or the motives that led to them, we should frequently find to be such as either the weakness of human nature could not easily avoid, or such as were well and wisely enough intended, though chance or error rendered the effect obnoxious.

Rash

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7

Rash resentments are equally inconsistent with true charity, and with true philosophy. The first recommends a temper that is patient, forgiving, and subdued; the last advises us to preserve our own quiet, by neglecting the insults, and enormities of others. The first teacheth us to forgive, as we would be forgiven; the last suggesteth to us, that, in consequence of human imperfection, we must necessarily meet with many disagreeable circumstances, and that it would be absurd to expect from such a creature as man unerring wisdom, or invariable benevolence.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes spoke agreeably to his character of wisdom, when he said,

B 4

“ Take

SERMON XIII

“ Take no heed unto all words that
“ are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant
“ curse thee ;

“ For oftentimes also thine own heart
“ knoweth that thou thyself likewise
“ hast cursed others *.”

But the essential characteristic of the
christian religion is not only long suffer-
ing ; for

II. Charity is kind :

That benevolence, that tenderness of
opinion, that love of human kind so
warmly recommended by the author of

* The Septuagint is more full in this particular :

Και γις πειρας λογους ως λαλησουσιν ασεβεις μη θης καρ-
διαν σε οπως μη απιστης τε δελη σε καταρωμεις δε δι
πλητακις ποτηρευσεις σε, η καταδοεις πολλας κακους
καρδιαν σε, οη ως και γις σου καταρασω ιλιθους :

our

our religion, and so visible in all his precepts, render him, while respectable as a legislator, amiable as a friend.

The lawgiver, who consults only the happiness of the people, who, in every edict, is apparently influenced by motives that make for the universal welfare, is generally and justly adored.

Such is the founder of the Christian dispensation—In all his doctrines, and in all his precepts, you see that kindness so peculiar to his own character, and so repeatedly recommended to all his followers—To love one another, to love as brethren, to be kindly affectioned one to another, are precepts universally enforced by all the evangelical and apostolical writers.

By

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By that wisdom which erreth not they were taught to know that this social affection was the surest foundation of moral goodness--that *love worketh no ill to his neighbour*, and that, therefore, *love is the fulfilling of the law*.

So necessary is this mutual kindness to the well being of society, and the happiness of human life, so expedient that benevolence which binds and endears us to each other, that no system of religion, which should not enjoin, no charity, that should not comprehend it, would be suited to the wants of the community, or adapted to the attainable excellence of our nature.

The greatest and the best part of our temporal happiness is founded on that friendly

SERMON XXI. 11

friendly and agreeable intercourse we have with one another. Without kindness this intercourse cannot subsist, or should it be kept up by commercial interests, the heart would derive no sincere or valuable satisfaction from it, when neither dignified by friendship, nor endeared by affection.

This disposition of kindness will save us from many painful and criminal passions, which the depravity of human nature is too apt to cherish. We can neither rejoice over the misfortunes of those we love, nor repine at their success.

III. Charity envieth not.

A happy exemption! whereby the Christian is set free from those deserved miseries that destroy the quiet of the envious!

He

He whose hopes lay hold on the sublime felicity of heaven, and the rewards of immortality, can never possibly be sensible of envy, because those distinctions and possessions which usually excite that sensation, with *him* can have no merit. The heart whose affections are placed on things above, is privileged from all the vexations that attend this guilty passion. The human mind has always one principal object, to which it's attention is turned, and on which it's hopes are fixed. Whatever interferes with these hopes will create uneasiness, and, if competition is in the case, there will be envy also. But a man can have no competitor for the favour of God, whose success can possibly be prejudicial to him, therefore he who seeks an interest only in the counsels
of

SERMON XIII. 13

of Providence, rests free from envy upon those principles.

Inferior considerations, and temporal interests, though they may require his attention, will never obtain such an influence over his heart as to make him envious or dissatisfied when he beholds others more successful in the pursuit. He moves forward with a calm and indifferent tranquillity, while he sees many strain before him to the goal of worldly distinctions and preferments. He is neither envious at the success of evil doers; nor is his heart a stranger to gladness during the time that *their corn and their wine increaseth.*

Yet it is not only because of uninterfering interests that the charitable man cannot

cannot envy. He is exempt from such sentiments upon nobler principles.

Tender and benevolent in all his dispositions, he has no wish but for the general happiness of his fellow-creatures, and in beholding that happiness, he finds his own. Agreeably to the principles and the practice of his divine master, he is ready to *rejoice with them that do rejoice*, and to *weep with them that weep*; far and happily different from the temper of envy, which weeps with them that rejoice, and rejoiceth with them that weep.

How gracious is that eternal providence which thus, in every dispensation, consults the benefit of mankind!—How kind that heavenly wisdom which instituted

tuted a religion, that, by rectifying the heart, gives it a capacity of happiness; and by cherishing the social and benevolent affections, would banish that evil out of the world, which is inseparable from the indulgence of contrary dispositions.

What a miserable sensation must envy be! and how destitute even of the common measure of happiness must be those wretched minds that entertain it!—A benevolent man makes the most of human enjoyments; and not a little increases that portion of felicity which falls to his own share, by 'partaking of and rejoicing in the welfare of others: But the diabolical spirit of envy converts those very circumstances to misery, from which benevolence bringeth forth joy.

Thrice

Thrice happy that gentle and charitable disposition, which so far from being pained by the apparent superiority of others, would, in tenderness be unwilling to give others pain by assuming a superiority itself.

IV. Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

Humility is inseparable from that genuine piety that christian benevolence and meekness of which the charity we are here describing is altogether comprehensive.

The subdued spirit and the humble sentiment are unavoidably adopted and derived from the temper and character of the author of Christianity—They who

learn

S E R M O N XIII 17

learn of him, must be meek and lowly; and, moreover, in such a temper they will infallibly find that *rest* which he hath promised.

There is scarce any sensation that brings more pain along with it than that of pride. However apt we are to indulge it in ourselves, we always take a pleasure in mortifying it in others, and if we likewise entertain so troublesome a guest, we seldom fail of being mortified in our turn.

But the humble mind is never exposed to any troubles of this kind, and this is another degree of happiness peculiar to that evangelical charity which *vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.*

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From what motives, or upon what principles this christian love or charity is always accompanied by humility, it is not difficult to discover.

Love and pride are always incompatible. The one gives the preference and esteem to it's object; the other assumes them both itself: The one is a social affection extended to others; the other is a selfish passion that centers in it's own being. Christian charity comprehends in its scheme of benevolence all human kind, and being *kindly affectioned in brotherly love, in honour preferreth* others. In such a system there is no place for pride: because there is no object over which it might exalt itself.

Humility

SERMON XIII. 19

Humility is a friend to decency and order, to a regular and becoming deportment in every station of life. And thus it is that

V. Charity doth not behave itself unseemly.

Upon an unwillingness to give offence no doubt it is that the apostle founds this characteristic of charity.

And, indeed, this is so amiable, and, for the commerce of society, so necessary a quality, that the system of christian virtues would have been very incomplete without it.

Little and ungenerous minds there are that take a low-thoughted pleasure in doing and saying offensive and unbe-

coming things—These evidently want that enlarged and benevolent spirit which is inspired by the genius, or formed upon the precepts of Christianity.

It was partly upon this principle that St. Paul became all things to all men; to render himself agreeable to them he admitted nothing in his own conduct offensive or unseemly; and this he did, as well in compliance with the spirit of his religion, as that by this agreeable politeness, and conformity of manners, he might, *by all means, gain some of them.*

S E R M O N XIV.

The Evangelical Charity.

I COR. xiii. 5, 6.

Charity seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.

HOW excellent is the spirit of that religion which enlarges and exalts the mind; that teaches the social affections to expand; and, banishing all that is sordid, or selfish from the heart, inspires it with the most diffusive benevolence, and the most unbounded love of human kind.

Such is the religion of a Christian. In the first dawn of it's publication, it's professors were distinguished by a degree of moral excellence which philosophy had contemplated, but had never practised.

Who can read without admiration, without catching something of a divine enthusiasm, the account which the writer of the *Acts* has given us of the first little united band of Christians?

“ All that believed, says he, were together, and had all things common.”

“ And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”

“ And

S E R M O N XIV. 23

“ And they continuing daily with
“ one accord in the temple, and break-
“ ing bread from house to house, did
“ eat their meat with GLADNESS and
“ SINGLENES OF HEART.

“ Praising God, and having favour
“ with all the people.”

However simple this narrative may
appear, it exhibits a most lively picture
OF THE EVANGELICAL CHARITY, in it's
various effects.

All that believed were together. It was
natural for a newly established sect to
associate, but the union of the Christians
was rendered dear and indissoluble by
that *charity* which was originally in-
spired from above.

By the precepts of their divine master the disciples had been taught to unite in affection, to love and to serve one another; but from the influences of that comforter which he had promised, they now experienced a new attachment, and a tenderness towards each other which was derived from the spirit of infinite benevolence.

The promise which the deceiver made to our first parents, that by eating of the forbidden fruit, *they should be as Gods*, the disciples of Christianity effectually experienced. Their hearts are refined from human depravity, and they appeared actuated only by that social and indiscriminate kindness, which we apprehend to be the distinguishing attribute of the Deity

Deity—I say, indiscriminate kindness; for the inspired writer informs us, they were not only dear to each other, but that they had *favour of ALL the people*—a proof that their benevolence was universal; for, when the unimproved state of human nature is considered, there can be no doubt but that they had amply merited this popular favour by their extensive kindness, and their open liberality.

VI. Charity seeketh not her own.

No sooner were the christians united by this principle of love, than all thoughts of private interest or property were overborne. *They had all things common: and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

It is impossible to consider these overflowings of an amiable and enthusiastic generosity without pleasure and admiration; but impartiality must acknowledge that it was too great to be lasting, and too diffusive to be long supported.— Had this spirit of unbounded benevolence and liberality been universal, and had the world been carried away by the same happy enthusiasm, the consequences would not have been so inconvenient; but it was necessary that the votaries of christianity should subsist by a commerce with men of different persuasions, who would avail themselves of the unbounded generosity of the former, without relieving the distresses which that generosity would produce.—Hence we find that the members of the infant church

were

SERMON XIV. 27

were frequently in the most necessitous circumstances, and that the apostles had many times occasion to solicit contributions to *the household of faith*.

But however inconvenient this large liberality, this total disregard of private property might, in some respect, be found, it was certainly preferable to that unfeeling selfishness, which has disgraced the later ages of the christian world.

Long, alas! hath been fled the liberal spirit of that charity which *seeketh not her own*. It's general influence, at least, hath long been lost; for, though we see some glorious instances of the most pure and disinterested benevolence, how deeply sunk in selfishness are the *bulk* of mankind! how destitute of every principle that

that centers not in private advantage!
and how meanly enslaved by the lowest
and most despicable of all attachments,
the thirst of gain!

Nor is universal liberality alone blotted
out of that shining list of virtues which
form the train of *the evangelical charity*;
the irascible passions have too general an
influence on the heart, and most of us,
alas! are too apt to indulge them, tho'
we know that

VII. Charity is not easily provoked.

It is not easy to determine whether the
wisdom or the goodness of such a mind
is greater—whether the lenity which
passes over the insults of others, or the
prudence which defends us from the
prevalence

SERMON XIV. 29

prevalence of anger, deserves the highest praise—The first is perfectly agreeable to the character of a christian, the latter is worthy the wisdom of a philosopher.

To act aright in this particular, as well as in all others, we need but follow invariably the steps of our Redeemer, *who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

But to follow invariably the steps of the Redeemer is, perhaps, in this, as well as in all other circumstances, impossible for human imperfection; and the apostle, who was well acquainted with the passions and infirmities of his nature, seems

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seems to have been sensible of this truth,
 when he tells us that charity is not *easily*
 provoked; as if he had said "there is a
 " degree of injurious insult, or of cruel
 " abuse which human nature may not
 " be able to bear: Unirritated patience
 " may, in some cases, be inconsistent
 " with the interests of truth or virtue,
 " and, in others, with the first law of
 " nature, self-defence; but regard to
 " the precepts of our divine master; the
 " preservation of our own tranquillity,
 " and the peace of society, require that
 " we should be *slow to anger*; that we
 " should not *easily* give ourselves up
 " to the impulse of resentment, but act,
 " in all things, like the disciples of that
 " meek and glorious sufferer, who re-
 " turned

S E R M O N XIV. 2 31

*“turned not railing for railing, but,
“trariwise, blessing.”*

To commit our cause *unto him that judgeth righteously* is the most proper determination for such erring creatures as we are, who seldom know how to adjust the punishment to the fault, or, had we that knowledge, might be led beyond the bounds of justice by a partiality to our importance, or an indulgence of our resentment.

Yet there are circumstances, no doubt, wherein the well-being and even the existence of society oblige us to retaliate the injuries of the offender. Indiscriminate forbearance, like unlimited munificence, can be practicable only in a state

of

of christian perfection: It would be as safe to forgive all where we should meet with no *voluntary* insults, as to give away our whole substance, when security of support in the beneficence of others.

But these are days, wherein, neither of the abovementioned virtues are to be carried to their utmost extent—It would be a disparagement to the wisdom and benevolence of the Supreme Being, to suppose that he should exact an obedience from us which would either involve us in obvious misery, or be pernicious to our country. Such a conclusion would be equally injurious to the honour of God, and abusive of that reason he has given us for our preservation.

But

But here the fanatic interposeth: and exclaims, "what will become of the law of religion, if in any case, we may recede from the severity of the precept?" I do not think it necessary to reply to this objection here, because I have, elsewhere *, shewn that the present perfection of the divine law was necessary, though human nature could not in all respects pay the exacted obedience.

Moreover, the conduct of the apostle with regard to Hymeneus and Alexander, particularly the latter, shews, that there are circumstances in which a proper resentment may be indulged.—If it shall be said, this behaviour was a weakness in the apostle; that will, at least, make

* Letters between Theodosius and Constantia.

for the latter part of my argument, viz. that the divine law may, in some circumstances, be above the capacity of human obedience.

Though I here view the frailties of man with the eye of a brother, I plead for no unnecessary, or unreasonable indulgence: I am persuaded that divines and moralists have ever hurt the interests of religion and virtue, when they have required in both an impracticable perfection.

Conscious of it's inability to arrive at consummate excellence, the mind beholds it's duty with despair; when, guided by sober judgment and reason, it might have made a happy progress in moral goodness.

When

When religion is painted by the puritan, and virtue by the romantic philosopher, we shun the one as we would a spectre, and think of the other as of a dream.

In all our interpretations of scripture doctrines we never ought to lose sight of reason, nor of the eternal attributes of God. The first we know to be one of his gracious gifts, and that, therefore, he can recommend nothing to us as a duty, or even as a point of faith, that is inconsistent with it's perceptions: The last we conceive to be unchangeable, and invariably consistent with each other.

Agreeably to these principles, let us enquire how we are to understand the apostle, when he says that

VIII. Charity thinketh no evil.

This is to be understood according to the general sense and acceptation of the expression, and not in all the latitude that the words will bear: In the original it is, * *doth not suppose any thing bad*, or doth not entertain any bad opinion.

This is a quality so peculiarly ascribed to charity, that the censorious and the malevolent are branded with the appellation of *uncharitable*—Not, indeed, without justice, or propriety; for the charity of opinion may have as much merit as that of beneficence, and is equally necessary to the happiness of society.

Nothing

SERMON XIV. 37

Nothing can be a surer proof of a generous disposition, of a heart that is humanized by the precepts of Christianity, than, in general, to think candidly and favourably of others.

The sentiments of the mind take their colour frequently from the inclinations of the heart, and such as we know ourselves, we imagine others to be. A good man will not easily think evil of his fellow creatures, but will give to all the credit of virtue, till experience and the evidence of facts have convinced him that they do not deserve it.

Caution, however, and the sense of that malignity which is the disgrace of our species should not be totally absent

from the thoughts of a good man. Too indiscriminate a charity of opinion may make him the dupe of villainy, and the generosity of his spirit and his sentiments may contribute to the success of designing wickedness.

In such a case he would have reason to lament, that while he had attended to one of his master's precepts, he had neglected another; and would be convinced that, in a world like this, the *wisdom of the serpent*, was by no means less necessary than the *innocence of the dove*.

The good, however, which he hopes and thinks of mankind will gratify both his expectations and his benevolence, when he beholds it practised; and the visible exercise of justice and veracity

will

S E R M O N XIV. 39

will yield him the most perfect satisfaction. For

IX. Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.

The happiness which virtue gives is not derived alone from the private and personal practice of it. Every true friend to piety and goodness has a real pleasure in their success, and generously and happily interests himself in it.

In the success of iniquity charity cannot rejoice, because that success is prejudicial to the common welfare; but the prevalence of truth, the prosperity of goodness, and the establishment of justice cannot but be grateful to that extensive benevolence which embraces human

40 S E R M O N XIV.

kind, and rejoiceth in the visible happiness of the world.

That charity would, indeed, be narrow and imperfect, which should not comprehend the general interests of virtue, nor concern itself beyond the limits of personal connections.

The evangelical charity takes a wider range, and having at heart the universal happiness of mankind, rejoiceth, upon those principles, when truth and righteousness flourish on the earth.

It is, moreover, her supreme delight when the religion of her divine master prevails among men; that exalted philanthropist, with whom she existed from the ages of eternity, and in whose bosom she shall repose when time shall be no more.

S E R M O N XV.

The Evangelical Charity.

I COR. xiii. 7.

Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

THAT meek and submitting spirit, that patient suffering, and silent resignation by which the Author of our religion was so amiably distinguished, could not but be included among those moral graces, which are comprehended under this extensive term of *charity*.

X. Cha.

X. Charity beareth all things; endureth all things.

Patience is not less peculiarly an attribute of christianity than it was of that philosopher of old, which went under the name of Stoicism.—But the patience of a christian is of a very different nature, and founded on principles very opposite to that of the Stoic. The former arises from the disposition of the heart; the latter rested on an ideal fortitude; the mere philosophy of the brain.—The former has its origin in humility; the latter was the offspring of pride. The christian is resigned as a being dependent on, and submissive to the dispensations of providence: The principles of the Stoic's patience

patience were centered in himself, and consisted in a vain and unnatural affectation of despising exterior evils.——

The Christian acknowledges the power of calamity, and the distresses of pain, but submits to them from a religious acquiescence in whatever the supreme Governor of the universe is pleased to permit—The Stoic idly endeavoured to persuade himself that there was no such thing as evil in the world, and, destitute of the comforts that attend a resignation on religious principles, languished under the irresistible attacks of misery, while he was making fruitless efforts to believe that misery had no existence.

Behold here, how superior is that wisdom which cometh from above, to
the

the unassisted searches of human reason! how blind, and bewildered were the children of philosophy, compared to those that walk in the light of the living God! How vain were their attempts to find a remedy for the evils of life, exclusive of those hopes of immortality, which the gospel brought to light? How inferior in all that is truly great and magnanimous were the disciples of Zeno to those of Jesus Christ! —The followers of the heathen philosopher, to avoid the inconvenient effects of their passions, were taught to oppose their laudable exertions, and thereby defeated that end for which nature had appointed them.—To arrive at fortitude, they aimed at insensibility, and, in cultivating patience, destroyed all

the gentle affections. To be exempt from misery, they endeavoured to deprive the heart of its feelings, and, from a selfish view of securing their own tranquillity, they proudly branded compassion with the name of weakness.

Upon far more amiable and more noble principles, the fortitude of a Christian is formed. His patience is the associate of CHARITY, and by that quality, which implies the love of God and of humankind, he is taught to bear what the wise providence of the former may have permitted, or the weakness of the latter may have brought upon him.

The

The patience that is derived from such a disposition is not to be wearied out by the frequent attacks of misery: The same principles will last for ever, and will support him under the repeated visitations of affliction.——It is the exalted spirit of this charity, this divine and social love, that renders him superior to the sufferings of human calamity. It is an emanation of the Deity himself, a disposition derived from and approaching towards the supreme perfection, which places him above the influence of mortal evil.

The happiness and perfection of human nature consist in making the nearest possible approaches to the disposition of God, and in nothing can man

repre-

S E R M O N XV. 47

represent his divine Creator so much as
in this exalted spirit of *the Evangelical
Charity*. From this he acquires an in-
clination of being pleased and satisfied
with every thing, and that habit of
mind which makes him chearful under
circumstances of ease, renders him re-
signed to the stroke of affliction. "Shall
"we, saith he, receive good at the hand
"of the Lord? and shall we not submit
"to evil? As the state of man is deter-
"mined by the unerring Wisdom to be
"a state of probation, shall we not bear
"with patience those temporary evils
"which are frequently so salutary to
"the mind, and afford the noblest exer-
"cise to virtue?"
But the Captain of our salvation, who
was made perfect through sufferings, en-
forces

forces this patience as well by the persuasion of example, as by the authority of precept.

See how mild! how silent the illustrious Sufferer! under the last distress of nature how patient! how resigned! he prayeth, indeed, that the bitter cup of affliction may pass from him, but under an entire resignation to the divine will.

“ Father, if this cup may not pass
“ from me, unless I drink it, thy will
“ be done.”

Such were the expressions of our divine Master, and such ought to be the language of every Christian, under the various circumstances of natural,

or

SERMON XV. 49

or of moral evil, to which, as mortal creatures, we are exposed.

Nor ought we less industriously to imitate our blessed Redeemer in his conduct towards men than towards his heavenly Father. His patience in the one is equally exemplary as his resignation in the other.

It was to follow the steps of their Lord in both these respects, that the apostles were reconciled to the severest sufferings and the most degrading contempt.

“I think,” saith one of the most eloquent, and not the least sufferer of those holy messengers, “that God hath set forth us, the Apostles last, as it were appointed to death. For we are
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“made a spectacle unto the world, and
“to angels, and to men.

“We are fools for Christ’s sake;
“we are weak ; we are despised.

“Even unto this present hour, we
“both hunger and thirst, and are nak-
“ed, and are buffeted ; and have no
“certain dwelling-place :

“And labour, working with our own
“hands. Being reviled, we bless ; being
“persecuted, we suffer it ; being de-
“famed, we intreat.

—There is scarce any circumstance of
human affliction, which these devoted
men did not suffer, and most of them,
indeed, they have themselves recorded.

—Nor is it to be wondered that they
should

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should record them, since they gloried in their persecutions, and counted it joy that they were thought *worthy* to suffer shame in the cause of the Redeemer.

But it was, nevertheless, on this grace of charity, this divine and social love, that all their fortitude and their forbearance were founded. Unsupported by this living and active principle, nature might have overthrown the resolutions of reason, even while the latter was appealed to by the hopes of immortality.

The sense of present evil has so much more influence over the frailty of human nature, than the prospect of distant good, that, though the immediate sufferings of the apostles were not to

be compared with their future rewards, yet, as men, they might have *fainted under their tribulations*, had not their hearts been confirmed by this animating, this heaven-inspired spirit of Charity.

Love is an active and unwearied principle, that is neither to be overcome by difficulties, nor deterred by dangers. For ever tending towards it's object, and every affection of the heart absorbed in the interest of that object, all circumstances that are foreign to this end are considered as indifferent, and all the inconveniences that attend the pursuit of it are borne without a murmur.

The

The object of the apostles love was their amiable, their adorable master.— With unwearied perseverance they preached his doctrines—with unbounded affection they pursued his interests—No labour was too difficult to execute; no misery too painful to bear.—Inspired by that charity which *beareth, which endureth all things*, they rejoiced in affliction, and triumphed over death. This was that love of God in Christ Jesus their Lord, from which one of them declares, that neither death nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, should be able to separate them.

This triumphant declaration was invariably fulfilled in all the conduct of

the sainted sufferers.—Life they esteemed not, but as it was exercised in establishing the religion of their Lord; and death they counted gain. Human principalities and powers were of little weight with *them*, who concluded that it was better to obey God than man; and who, when they were brought before rulers and kings for their master's name, were so far from being deterred by their authority, that they boldly preached his doctrines and asserted his truth in their presence. — Things present did not, and things to come could not weaken their faith, or weary out their love—nor could height or depth, in which the utmost bounds of nature, and every possible contingency are implied, have power
to

to change that charity which *never faileth*, which came down from heaven, and aspired to it again.

With respect, indeed, to bearing and enduring, those properties of charity were in a more extraordinary manner exercised in the persons of the apostles, than they have been, or, at least, now are in any members of the Christian Church.—If our graces, if our gifts are not equal to those which the first promoters of Christianity possessed, neither are our trials equal to theirs.—The Almighty Providence seems always to have proportioned the powers of his servants to the exigencies of the time, and to have granted such degrees of grace and faith as might be adequate

to the persecutions or temptations that were to be undergone.

Possibly that exalted degree of charity, which the apostles derived from the spirit of God, may be now no more ; but, as we are expressly told that it never faileth, so much of it must still remain as may be necessary to support us in the several departments of duty, and to place us above the influence of accidental calamities or temptations.

We have not what the apostles had to bear. — We are not persecuted on the account of religion ; but life has many other moral evils which call upon us for such a spirit of resignation and patience as is inspired by the love of God and of humankind.

There

There are, moreover, many other graces necessary, though possibly not in so great a degree, for us as they were for the apostles; nor is it by any means unimportant to us that

XI. Charity hopeth all things, believeth all things.

Whether we suppose that this hope, ascribed by the apostle to charity, is to be accepted in a moral, or in a religious sense, it will be found equally necessary to our peace.— We shall do wisely, therefore, to cultivate it in both; and shall find it for our happiness neither to fear every thing from man, while we hope every thing from God, nor yet, while we hope every thing

thing from man, to fear every thing from God.

Either of these apprehensions must be equally destructive of our peace: Our dependence on the Almighty must make us everlastingly wretched, if accompanied only by fear; and our commerce with our fellow creatures would render us miserable, were all confidence, all hope at an end. He who hopeth all things from God, gives that honour to his merciful attributes, which is due from reason and from gratitude; he who hopeth every thing from man, even though he should often be disappointed, is possessed of a happier, because of a more benevolent temper, than those that look upon mankind as in a state of general enmity, and think of

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of every man they meet with, as of a designing foe.

However, with respect to our hope both from God, and from man, some restrictions, no doubt, are necessary; what we know of the disposition of our fellow creatures, and what we believe of the nature of the supreme Being, ought to regulate our expectations in regard to both.

We are not to hope that the eternal Lover of truth and justice can leave unpunished the transgressors of his sacred laws. We believe that he is a rewarder only of the sincere of heart, the faithful and the honest; and from thence we may conclude, with the sacred writer, that *the hope of the hypocrite shall perish.*

Expe-

Experience convinceth us, that, with respect to our fellow-creatures, universal righteousness is far from prevailing among men: It is, therefore, necessary for our own security, that our hopes of them should be bounded by reason and experience—that we should neither indiscriminately judge of the whole species as destitute of every moral principle; nor implicitly trust them with our lives and fortunes.—The first sentiment would always be injurious to the community; the other might, many times, be detrimental to ourselves.

In this manner, and under these restrictions, to hope and to believe will, I trust, be found consistent with THE EVANGELICAL CHARITY.

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S E R M O N XVI.

The Doctrine of Repentance.

JOB xi. 13, 14.

*If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch
out thy hands towards him; if iniquity
be in thy hands, put it far away, and
let not wickedness dwell in thy taber-
nacles.*

EVER since religion was published
in the world, repentance has been
considered as a part of it.

We must, however, except the first
publication of the will of God. Our
first

first parents were created perfect, and if they transgressed the religious obligation which they received from their Creator, they were by no means to be excused through an act of repentance; for repentance only can be admitted in a state of imperfection.

But when this became the state of man—when by the loss of his original innocence, and the high privileges of his nature, he became an easy prey to every temptation, it was necessary that the divine lawgiver should no longer be *extreme to mark what was done amiss*—that he should accept of some sacrifice for sin, some satisfaction for the breach of those laws, which, without such acknowledgments, would have lost their authority; and, had no such acknowledgments been admitted,

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admitted, would have proved ministers of wrath, to establish more universally the dominion of death.

These sacrifices were at first a kind of penal task, till the improving arts of society had rendered it easy to procure them, and the increase of property facilitated the commission of sin.

Hence, in the Jewish church of old, it was as easy for a rich man to sin, and to expiate, as it is, at present, in the church of *Rome*.

This abuse of the original intention of sacrifices, was complained of by those prophets and legislators who, being of a more liberal turn, concluded that the Almighty could no longer be pleased with

any

any of those external atonements, which, as they were now so easily effected, could no more strengthen the authority of the laws, than they could tend to the perfection or the improvement of manners.

In the divine name, therefore, they called upon the people to *bring no more vain oblations*, but to *turn from their evil ways*, and to offer that sacrifice to God, which alone could be acceptable to a reasonable being, a heart that repented of its former wickedness.

This is what we mean by that repentance, which, under the Christian system likewise, qualifies us for the mercies of God, and the mediation of Christ.

I have

S E R M O N XVI 63

I have not found this duty laid down any where more regularly than in the above quoted words of Job's friend.

The whole of it is specified in four particulars :

I. The preparation of the heart.

II. The act of humiliation before God.

“ If thou prepare thy heart, and stretch out thy hands towards him.”

III. We have instructions for our conduct, in consequence of such a preparation and humiliation.

“ If iniquity be in thy hands, put it far away.”

IV. And lastly, an exhortation, agreeable to the former, to regard the conduct of our families.

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“ And

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“And let not wickedness dwell in thy
“tabernacles.”

The first mentioned, as it is the first necessary duty, is the preparation of the heart; a duty not less difficult in the execution, than important in the end; *for the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*: To unfold, and to examine clearly into all it's principles, to discover and expose it's reconciling arts, and to trace it through the recesses of vanity and of care, is a task for Omniscience; nor is it from the lowest conviction of the Almighty Power that he is called *the searcher of hearts*.

Self-examination, however necessary, is seldom agreeable: Even piety is sometimes afraid of finding too many weak-

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nesses for the divine indulgence; and it is the industry of vice to steal from conviction, and to tread softly by the sleeping lion.

Let not, however, a good man be afraid to search his heart, nor to lay open his failings before his father who is in heaven.——The God of mercies and of wisdom will not suffer his creatures to be *tempted above what they are able to bear, but will, with the temptation, make a way to escape.* Whoever is free from the abandoned guilt of voluntary crimes need not doubt to find acceptance with him, whose merits have made satisfaction for the involuntary and inseparable frailties of human nature.

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But shameless and obdurate vice has much more to do. He, who has been long deaf to the remonstrances of reason and of conscience, in whom the principles of wickedness have been confirmed by habit and by time, will find it a work of labour to remove that barrier he has been so industrious to raise between himself and his salvation.

When the mind has been long enslaved by wickedness, it is in danger of losing even the liberty of changing it's principles, and of rescuing itself from the tyranny of vicious habits.

Unhappy for the hardened sinner, that the work of repentance is to him so great; yet more unhappy, if he slumbers

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in unalarmed security, to be awaked only by the last stroke of death!

Let him whose life has resembled, but who would not wish that his last end should be like this, instantly *prepare his heart* for the business of repentance—

Let not his aversion to religion, nor even his ease and security under his present circumstances, render him inattentive to his duty, or repress the sense of the divine disapprobation. He cannot be without a reasonable conviction, if he compare his conduct with the laws of God; and a reasonable conviction once excited, what remains but to impress the force of it on the heart?

Yet, alas! when the heart should be thus addressed, other arguments interfere, and bear down the force of reason, and of conscience.

The man of pleasure cannot conceive how there should be any happiness in the enjoyments of the mind, or that it can exist in any thing except the gratification of the senses—As these are, in general, contrary to the precepts of Christianity, he cannot think of conforming to rules of conduct that preclude his favourite pursuits, or of languishing away an undiversified life in penal austerities, and monastic dulness—Such are his ideas of religion, which he considers only as a gloomy institution, that dooms its votaries to sadness and melancholy.

The man of avarice, who knows no pleasure but in the acquisition of riches—the ambitious and the vain, who can be gratified only by the dreams of eminence,

nence, and the flattery of dependence—the villain of every denomination, under the mask of piety, or the front of profligacy—These will hardly be induced by any convictions of reason to embrace those precepts which deny them their pleasures, and those doctrines that would change the system of their lives.

But religion's most prevailing rivals for the heart, are the love of pleasure, and the desire of fame—These passions were given us by the wise and benevolent author of nature for gracious and for glorious ends—to direct us for the first to the fountains of immortal life, and for the last to the approbation of our God.

From the perversion of these passions we derive much of our sin and misery.

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The quest of pleasure is generally confined to our younger years—whatever flatters the present appetite, we pursue with all the eagerness of inexperience, alike regardless of the admonitions of those who have proved the vanity of this world's enjoyments, and the doctrines of those who remind us of another.—The heart has found whereon it may repose, and to *prepare* it for repentance from what it approves, though it were *repentance from dead works*, would be utterly impracticable.—Before the heart can repent, it must first learn to disapprove it's pursuits and attachments.

Here then let me observe to the young and the gay, that those idle pleasures they are now in pursuit of, are, in general,

ral, not only beneath the dignity of a reasonable-being, but will, certainly, after a short time, delight no more— Youth and beauty are possessions they are parting with every day. The rejoicing spirits of manly vigour, the exulting hope, the enchanting prospect, *shall* in a few, *may* in a very few years be extinguished in the dark mansions of the grave.

Every fair form that is now animated with lively sense and sprightly fancy, shall soon moulder in the common dust; senseless and forgotten through a series of 'ages—Perhaps, ere we once more assemble in this sacred place—perhaps, before to-morrow's sun shall set, some ear that is now attending to these observations may be closed in insensibility.

How

How vain then to form any engaging attachments, except that *one* which is *needful*, in a life so short, and, in all things so uncertain! Vain, at the best, are all the pleasures of youth; but more ridiculously vain are the worldly pursuits of age.

Ambition and vanity, which are the offspring of the before-mentioned perverted love of fame, are not seldom to be found in those years, which wisdom and experience should have crowned with virtue—Yet, is it possible? Can age have it's vanities? Shall the plume of folly nod over grey hairs? Can there be any thing here of consequence enough to alarm or interest those, who shortly are departing never to return? What is

the

the business, what are the mighty engagements that can employ the prudence and wisdom of age? Can it be exercised in the pursuit of titles, or honours?—in adding new decorations to an house, or new dignities to a name?—in courting the breath of popular favour, or in feasting on the flying rumour of the day?—Are these the employments of declining life? and do these prevent the heart from *preparing* itself for the great business of repentance?

But if the arguments which are drawn from the vanity of earthly pursuits should not have sufficient weight to overcome our attachments to them, the prospects and the sanctions of futurity cannot surely, be considered in vain.

The sense of a total exclusion from happiness, and from God—the final forfeiture of that immortality which the mercies of redemption have secured, and the glad tidings of the gospel have brought to light, must on a mind, not lost to sensibility, as well as to reason, have a striking effect.

Yet should every argument, however conclusive, should every motive, however powerful, fail to excite in the abandoned a sense of his misery, and to *prepare for repentance* the heart where vice has been long established, though human means are ineffectual, there is yet a resource in that power to whom nothing is impossible.

He who has been long under the influence of sin, should he behold the danger

danger to which he is exposed—should he be convinced of the ruinous condition of wickedness, yet find his heart unwilling to quit it's present attachments—nothing remains for such a one but to apply to the divine bounty for grace and assistance.—Yet this is by no means a precarious resource; for, has it not the confirmation of a divine promise, that the returning sinner shall not sue in vain? and is not he *faithful who hath promised?*

This introduces the second circumstance in the progress of repentance, viz. *The act of humiliation before God.*

“When thou hast prepared thy heart;
“lift up thy hands towards him.”

When we address our prayers to a power so infinitely superior to us as the Almighty

Almighty is conceived to be, we cannot be too attentive to the propriety even of our external deportment. And that attitude of body which carries with it the marks of submission we should do well to observe, because it is nothing more than another kind of speech, or expression, that indicates the meaning of the mind.

But whatever be the posture of the body, during our penitential prayers, let us be especially attentive to the condition of the mind.

Let our prayers ascend with such a degree of faith as may entitle us to come unto God by believing that he is, and that he is a rewarder of all such as call upon him faithfully. Let us not render ourselves disqualified for his mercies, by entertaining

retaining any doubt that he will extend them even to us.—Let us conclude that the humble spirit which acknowledges it's weakness, and seeks for strength in the Lord of armies, shall never be disappointed of assistance, or of grace.

Let us remember that the Father of mercies is always more ready to hear than we to pray, and that he is, indeed, wont to give more than we can possibly deserve.—It would be endless to enumerate the many passages in the holy scriptures that contain the gracious promises of reconciliation to returning sinners.—The all-merciful God will in *no wise cast out such as come unto him*—Those that *seek shall find*, and to those that *knock* it shall be *opened*. *He who spared not his*

own son, shall he not with him freely give us all things?

Such gracious encouragement have we on the part of God; an encouragement which must for ever enhance the guilt of obstinate and impenitent wickedness—Were the Almighty represented to us as a severe Being, as hard to be intreated, irascible and revengeful, we might have some excuse for our fear though none for our folly—but surely to neglect the kindness, the indulgence of the supreme mercy must be the highest aggravation of daring impiety.

In the solemn act of humiliation before God, let us remember chiefly to consider the vast distance between fallen man and his Creator. That thought will

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work in us an humble frame of mind,
and an awful reverence of the Father of
spirits.

When we consider that the eye of that
immortal Being, whose favour and for-
giveness we solicit, is upon us—that
the Almighty is, in presence, witness to
our thoughts, it must unavoidably affect
us with the most solemn sentiments.—
This consideration ought, indeed, to be
present with us on every occasion, but
most particularly during the sacrifice of
penitential prayer.

He who reflects that the all-seeing eye
of heaven is conscious of every thought,
and can pierce the inmost recesses of the
soul, will not only be humble in his de-

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portment,

portment, but sincere in his intentions;
and, when he is lifting up his *hands*
towards God, if iniquity be in them, will
put it far away.

The Doctrine of Repentance.

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III. In the act of repentance, let us

ever be remembered that the

essential part of it is the relinquishment

of sin. This certainly is the only end

that can make it acceptable to a Being

who

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The Doctrine of Repentance.

J O B xi. 13, 14.

If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thy hands towards him, if iniquity be in thy hands, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.

III. **I**N the act of repentance, let it ever be remembered that the essential part of it is the relinquishment of sin. This, certainly, is the only end that can make it acceptable to a Being

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who is divinely and perfectly reasonable. For can we be so stupid as to suppose, with absurd monastics, that the Almighty is to be gratified by penal austerities? Shall we blaspheme his honour, and disparage his attributes with the rites of Moloch? Shall we believe that he delights in the sacrifice of groans and scourgings, that he rejoices in the meagre aspect of mortified melancholy, or exults like envy over prostrate wretchedness?—How long shall we confine religion to forms, and forget the substance of it? When shall we give the credit due to the Apostle, who tells us, that *pure religion and undefiled before God, is to visit the fatherless and widows, in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted of the world.*

Thus,

Thus, in consequence of our repentance, a negative goodness is not alone sufficient.—It is not enough merely, if iniquity be in our hands, to put it far away; nor shall we have fully discharged our duty, by keeping ourselves unspotted of the world.—The task of active virtue remains to be performed, and the performance thereof is certainly a more acceptable atonement than all sacrifices and oblations of whatever denomination.

Let the pious craft of conventual superstition teach that crimes are to be expiated by religious dedications, and by munificence idly employed in enriching the retreats of holy indolence.—Let them inspire their deluded follow-

ers with the vain confidence, that their sins may be absolved by church-gratuities and insignificant penances:— thanks to the kindness and the care of providence, we have shaken off those yokes that fetter the understanding. Holding fast *the liberty with which Christ hath made us free*, we dare to think out of the channel of Churchmen, and to enquire what modes of duty a reasonable Being must expect from his creatures.

We know (for reason assents while revelation teaches) what kind of worship ought to be paid to that intellectual Providence who *requireth truth in the inward parts*.

We

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We are sensible, we are naturally conscious that forms and ceremonies have no merit with HIM—that he regardeth not the labour of the lips, and that no mode of repentance can be agreeable to him, which does not finally influence the conduct of our lives. —

As the immediate Governor of the universe, it can only be to his purpose that our morals are improved, and that we are more beneficial to ourselves and to our fellow-creatures. For these ends, undoubtedly, it was, that religion was instituted, and that the sense of divine sanctions was impressed upon the mind. What is it to a Being infinitely happy and secure in his own perfections, whether so low a creature as man should regard him with reverence, or be ig-

norant of his existence? From the same benevolent motives that he gave us life, he gave us laws for the regulation of it; that we should not wander in the blindness of our mind, nor look for happiness out of that sphere of duty in which we are directed to move.

When, therefore, we consider the divine motives in the appointment of our religious conduct, we must unavoidably conclude that a moral and practical, not a ceremonial,—or formal worship must be what he requires from us.

Hence, it must well become us to reflect that sincerity in our resolutions of amendment must be the essential, and, indeed, the only acceptable part of

of repentance. Unless we are serious in the design of reformation, a few transitory sighs or tears will by no means avail us—will never atone for our past offences, and much less entitle us to any future indulgence.—How replete with folly, moreover, must such a conduct be? for what is it else but to dissemble with infinite Knowledge, while we solicit Heaven for a while to spare the interposing rod, that we may have respite and convenience for the repetition of our crimes?

Man, though a short-sighted creature, is frequently guilty of an act of involuntary impiety, and is apt to measure the capacity and conduct of his Creator by his own. He forgets, while he is offering,

fering him this formal worship, that *he searcheth the heart, and knoweth our thoughts long before.* Blind, and foolish and unthinking as he is, he is even less circumspect in his conduct towards the Almighty, than in his transactions with his fellow-creatures;—never would he hope from these any favour, or indulgence, while he scrupled not to do every thing that was injurious or disagreeable to them.—To expect favour from an object which he voluntarily offends is an insult which man only practises on his God.

But is it, then, in vain he is told that *the hopes of the hypocrite shall perish?*—Is it in vain, he is summoned from his dream of mistaken security by that voice which calls him to arise from *dead works?*

But

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But let him, nevertheless, be told, that to make a form of reconciliation with God without a design never more to offend him, to lift up our hands towards him, before they are *washed in innocency*, and to pray for assisting grace, without taking one step for reformation, is nothing else but to mock the presence of the Almighty, and to deride the counsels of the Most High.

The villain who deceives under the sanctity of friendship—The vicious servant, who, by the professions of officious honesty, secures to himself his master's favour, that he may enjoy longer and more easy opportunities of committing his depredations, have, in human consideration, something of the same

same guilt with these unreforming penitents, if to call them penitents be not an abuse of the term:—for repentance necessarily implies conversion, and, without it, is nothing.

Sorrow and contrition and humiliation by no means effect the main business.—If the heart is not made better, if the springs of action, and the principles of conduct are not influenced, if our lives are not rectified, nor our inclinations changed, sorrow and contrition and humiliation, whether real, or affected, are equally vain.

A sudden emotion, a transitory impulse, a constitutional turn of passion may fill the breast of vice with an involuntary

voluntary sigh, and force from the eye of wantonness, an unmeaning tear.

The solemn form of humiliating severity may be put on by the hypocrite of every denomination—but the firm resolution of amendment, the sincere regret for past offences, and the heart-felt acknowledgement of guilt and frailty are the distinguishing characteristics of the true penitent. He knows that the resolutions of future piety must be the only acceptable sacrifice he can make for those errors in his conduct of which he is now ashamed, and, through the merits of the divine mediation, the only means of a reconciliation with that offended Power whose laws he has broken. He will studiously endeavour to fortify

his heart against the future insinuations of vice, and avoid, with industry, every occurrence and invitation, that might again engage him in the service of sin. Conscious of the weakness of his moral powers, and convinced, by lamented experience, of the natural depravity of the human heart, he will not place his last confidence in himself, but will apply to that gracious Being, for protection and assistance, who has promised his supporting grace to every faithful prayer.

Like the penitent here described, let every one who undertakes the great business of repentance, regulate his conduct and direct his heart.

Let him who humbles himself and lifts up *his hands towards God*, form,

in the mean time, these determinations of obedience; for well may he be assured that, without them, his professions of sorrow and humiliation will be as impious as they are impertinent, as odious as they are vain. His petitions for the divine indulgence and forgiveness, without concurring resolutions of moral reformation, shall rise up against him as so many dreadful testimonies of his audacious hypocrisy, and abandoned guilt.

But are these arguments, you will say, at all necessary? Is it not universally obvious, and as universally allowed, that no repentance can be acceptable to God except that which brings an actual reformation of manners along with it? — It is indeed universally obvious, and, I hope,

univer-

universally allowed; but nevertheless the general conduct of mankind convinces us, that arguments on this subject are, by no means, superfluous.

Let every man appeal to his own heart, and ask himself whether he has not, some time or other, made a form of ineffectual repentance—whether he has not, during the transitory prevalence of a pious disposition, implored the forgiveness of Heaven, with feeble and unconfirmed resolutions of future virtue,—resolutions that have been quickly overborne by the influence of the world, and have yielded to the first attacks of temptation!—Yet if there are few who have thus vainly repented in private; who is there, that, in the forms

of

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of public worship, has not joined in the general confession of sin? who has not thus publickly acknowledged his transgressions, has not prayed that he might *hereafter lead a godly, righteous, and sober life*, and, in all respects, gone through what may at least be called a general form of repentance, without regarding either the import, or the end of it?

Thus far with respect to the necessity of a *practical* repentance, one part of which must necessarily be an attention to that FAMILY RELIGION, which is the last thing suggested to us in the subject of this discourse.

IV. Were once the important points of repentance and reformation gained,

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scarce any arguments would seem requisite to enforce this charge; but as the narrowness and weakness of the human capacity is such that a due attention is seldom paid to the most obvious points of duty, the friend of Job added nothing superfluous when he recommended domestic piety to the penitent.

Every principal of a family, whether his household consists only of such as are connected to him by nature, or of menial dependents, or of both, ought always to remember, that as the first have a natural, so the last have a moral right to his patronage and direction——and that in proportion as the interests of a future life are superior to the engagements of this, he ought, in reason, to exert that care for the spiri-

SERMON XVII. 99

tual welfare of his family, which, in humanity, he would exercise for their temporal advantage.

The parent is led by the dictates of nature, to consult the happiness of his children, but it is not always that his cares are wisely, or effectually employed.

To promote the present interest, and to increase the fortunes of their offspring most parents are, indeed, sufficiently solicitous; and this no doubt is a laudable, but ought only to be a secondary concern.—The obligations of moral honesty, the duties of religion and the care of the immortal soul, ought to be the first objects of every parent's attention.

100 SERMON XVII.

It is a happier, it is a nobler thing to make one child honest, than to make many rich.—To direct the steps of youth to tread firmly in the paths of virtue, to instruct them how to guard against the solicitations of unlawful and destructive pleasures, and to fortify the unpractised heart against the insinuations of vice is a necessary and a glorious task; a task, which to every parent who has a rightly-founded affection for his offspring, brings the reward of its labour along with it.

Can any human action be more meritorious than those that tend to the everlasting happiness of our fellow-creatures?

To open the blind eyes, to direct the simple in their way, and to instruct the

S E R M O N XVII. 101

the ignorant in the road that leadeth to life !

As a proof how excellent and how acceptable are these duties, we are told, that *they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars in the firmament.*

But were there no promissory rewards annexed to the performance of these generous offices, the benevolent affections of nature should surely have sufficient influence with us to recommend them.

If the affections of nature are overborne, yet political considerations might induce us to the practice of family religion. A society that daily unites in private prayer must have strong inducements to mutual faith and affection : for that member of a family must be

102 S E R M O N XVII.

abandoned indeed, and utterly lost to all influence of conscience, who can abuse the confidence of a friend, in whose prayers he bears a part, and whom he accompanies in the solemn worship of the Almighty God.

I leave these several arguments to your consideration, and intreat the God of mercies to direct you in the use of them.

S E R M O N XVIII.

The Sufferings and Expectations of the Apostles an Argument in Favour of the Christian Religion.

I COR. XV. 19.

*If in this life only we have hope in Christ,
we are of all men the most miserable.*

THOUGH the genius and temper of the christian religion render almost every other argument in it's favour unnecessary, yet, perhaps, the circumstances of it's early state afford the

most convincing proofs that its origin is divine.

If we consider that the persons appointed, by our blessed Redeemer, to plant the gospel in all nations, were, most of them, without learning, and without influence, the conclusion is obvious, that nothing but an Almighty hand could have supported them against the pride of wisdom, and the insolence of power.

Suppose, in our times, an inconsiderable number of men, chiefly illiterate, should disperse into the different quarters of the world, and declare that a divine person had appeared in a remote province; that he had instituted a new religion, and

con-

confirmed the truth of his mission by miracles, could we hope, or imagine that these declarations alone would have power to break through established systems? Could we then expect that whole states and nations should give up their tutelary Gods, with whom they had such interesting connections, and to whom they were so faithfully attached, for the tales of *babblers*, and *setters forth of strange Gods*? Could it be supposed that the bigotted Athenians, who banished a citizen for declaring that the statue of MINERVA was no living Deity, but the work of Phidias*,—who could condemn the brave ALCIBIADES for defacing the statue of MERCURY—who

* Diog. Laert. Lib. ii.

could

106 SERMON XVIII.

could put to death the divine SOCRATES for speaking against the incredible fables of SATURN and JUPITER †—Was it, I say, to be supposed that any of these Athenians should become converts to the preaching of St. PAUL?—Yet, behold, several of them do become converts to his preaching; and one, even of the *Areopagus*, that court, whose bigotted principles had formerly banished STILPO, and condemned SOCRATES, now acknowledges the truth of the christian religion.—Paul, indeed, was not an illiterate preacher: He was *an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures*; but surely, without the co-operating power of God, he would have preached in vain to the *Areopagus* of Athens, even whilst he quoted

† Plato. Eutrypho.

their

S E R M O N XVIII. 107

their poet Menander to prove that the God of nature was one universally existent and intelligent Being.

But allowing, what seems hardly credible, that Paul might make converts at Athens, as well as in other places, by the power of his eloquence; did the rest of the apostles owe their success to the same means? What eloquence could there be amongst illiterate fishermen, carpenters, and officers of the customs? Yet these were all successful in their ministry, and converted thousands to the faith of Christ—They, indeed, received the gift of tongues from the effusion of the spirit; but did they, at the same time, receive the gift of eloquence, the various powers of persuasion, and the art
of

of addressing the passions? It is plain from those compositions they have left us, that they did not; nor was it necessary, while the hand of God was with them, and their doctrines were confirmed by the concurring testimony of miracles.

Hence then the argument, that without these miraculous powers, and without this divine concurrence no new religion could have been established, by an inconsiderable number of men, so extensively, and so effectually, as christianity was by the apostles.

But it is not so much from their success in propagating the religion of Christ that I mean to derive any arguments in favour of the truth of it, as from their own particular views and private convictions.

It

S E R M O N XVIII. 109

It is not to be imagined that any set of men, however ignorant, should be prevailed upon to undertake a task apparently dangerous and difficult, that was attended with no hopes, or prospects of advantage.

The question, then, will be—what were the views of the apostles in labouring to propagate the religion of Jesus, and to establish doctrines which had brought their author to a painful and disgraceful death?

Could it be from the prospect of any temporal advantage, that they persisted in performing the commands of their executed Lord? Could they hope, from such a scheme, to enjoy the affluence
of

110- SERMON XVIII.

of wealth, or the pleasures of luxury?—
No—for they *wandered about in solitary
places of the wilderness; hungry and
thirsty, their souls fainted in them—they
were in tribulation and distress; in famine
and nakedness; in weariness and painful-
ness—always without the conveniencies,
and often without the necessaries of life.*

Could it then be with any ambitious
view? Did they hope for fame or glory
from men? Neither could that possibly
be the case, since their master himself
had previously informed them, that, *for
his name's sake*, they should suffer all
manner of evils.—Contempt and poverty,
and pain and death. This prophecy they
found most dreadfully verified—for they
were subjected to *cruel mockings and
scourgings*

SERMON XVIII. 111

scourgings—they were spitefully intreated, and imprisoned—their life was persecution, and their death was torture.

Hence might the apostle reasonably exclaim, that if in *this life only*, they had hope in Christ, *they were*, of all men, the most miserable.

But, behold now the true cause of their perseverance! Their hopes were by no means confined to this life; nor, indeed, was there any object in it that seemed to merit their attention. Their expectations stretched beyond the limits of this world, to lay hold on that *exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, which he had promised, who could not deceive. This glorious promise was confirmed to their hopes by circumstances of which
they

112 S E R M O N XVIII.

they had themselves been eye-witnesses, even the miraculous circumstances of their master's life and resurrection.

Behold here the fallacy of that argument, that the disciples of Jesus might, from the connections of friendship alone, give a false testimony to his miracles, and to all the other divine indications of his mission! What! can the connections of friendship, of departed friendship, prevail over the fear of pain and punishment, of disgrace and death? Could the apostles, if they had looked upon their Lord as an impostor, and themselves as instrumental in extending a falsely acquired reputation; could they, I say, have been contented, for such a vile, and, to them, unprofitable purpose,

S E R M O N XVIII. 113

to undergo the last extremities of distress ?
Can any thing be more absurd than even
such a supposition ?

The disciples of Jesus were well convinced of the divine mission of their master ; and, for this cause, through all their sufferings, they fainted not. For this they were content to follow the fortunes of him that was *despised, and rejected of men.* Hence, though troubled on every side, they were not distressed. They were perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed.

They knew that, if their *earthly tabernacle* were dissolved, they had a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

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With such glorious, such well confirmed hopes as these, we can no longer wonder that *they endured the cross, despising the shame*: For, what were the sufferings of a transient life compared with the object of such hopes as these? Of what consequence was it that they were *brought before rulers and kings for his name's sake*, who was gone before them *to prepare a place*, a mansion of everlasting felicity amongst the allotments of the blessed?

Should it be asked why the Almighty Redeemer suffered his servants to encounter such difficulties, and to languish in such distress—why he did not make the subject world acknowledge his Divinity, and embrace his precepts—that may be easily accounted for.

It

SERMON XVIII. 115

It is well known, and rightly concluded, from the whole œconomy of Providence, that the divine agency interferes not generally with the human will. — Thus, though, in some circumstances, the immediate power of God might bring over a convert to the christian faith, which probably was the case with Dionysius the *Arcopagite*, yet the world in general was left at liberty to exert those acts of faith, which were numbered in the system of christian virtues.

Had these exercises been involuntary, they could no longer have had any merit; and to have compelled either the religious or the moral virtues of mankind, must have been inconsistent with the purpose of the supreme government, which is to leave man a moral agent.

But why, it may be asked, did God appoint the low, and illiterate part of mankind, to bear the *glad tidings* of that redemption which his goodness provided us, and his wisdom planned?—Why—but to leave to their own efficacy truths that were thus simply conveyed, and to render the faith of men more meritorious, more their own free and unforced assent, when their reason was appealed to by the truth of facts, while their passions were not solicited by the powers of eloquence.—This, moreover, might serve as a check to the insolence of human wisdom, which at that time, as well as in our own, was ready to exalt itself *above all that is called God.*

Should it be objected that the vulgar are easily imposed on, that they might be induced

induced to believe the reality of false miracles, or be excited to bear the greatest extremities, through the confidence of enthusiasm—That objection will soon be refuted, because some of the apostles had the advantage of human learning.

The conversion of the persecuting Saul, might alone be sufficient to silence every objection against the truth of Christianity. Whether we consider him as a Pharisee only, and consequently full of the impracticable prejudice of his sect, or particularly as an enemy to the christian cause, and making a merit of dragging to death, or imprisonment, it's poor despised professors, the conclusion must ever produce in us the utmost astonishment,

nishment,—to see this furious zealot join the sect he was determined to destroy!—to see him relinquish the hopes of preferment, and of fame, to espouse the cause of a few despicable, dejected Nazarenes!—Was not here manifestly the interposition of Providence? Could any but a supernatural power have wrought so strange an effect?

Obedient to the divine impulse, this haughty pharisee submitted himself to the instruction of those apostles that were so lately the objects of his persecution and his scorn.

Perhaps he knew not then the distresses he must endure in the service of his Redeemer—he knew not that he must be abandoned

abandoned to the cruelty of persecution, the sport of insolence, and the rage of tyranny—yet, when he had experienced these, he reasonably concludes that they were to be borne for the expectations of a glorious eternity.

If our hopes in Christ, says he, should perish with this life—if, when we had suffered every circumstance of distress, the invention of cruelty, or the consequence of want, our miseries and existence should have the same period, *we*, of all men, should be most miserable.

But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. His words, *which cannot pass away*, his eternal promises shall support us under all the conflicts which nature

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would

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would behold with horror, or the fears of mortality would avoid.

Hence, continues he, in the language of triumph, *I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

would behold with horror, or the tears
of mortality would avoid.

S E R M O N XIX.

Hence, continues he, in the language

**The Folly and Misery of
Wickedness.**

power, not things, pleasures, not things to
come, nor things, nor things, nor any other

creature shall be able to separate us from

the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus

ISA. lvii. 21.

*There is no peace, saith my God, to the
wicked.*

REASON is not the only guide
that, exclusive of revelation, is ap-
pointed us for our conduct. The feel-
ings of the heart are so many power-
ful monitors that continually suggest to
us what we ought to do. The dis-
quiet

quiet that attends the pursuit of wickedness plainly points out the necessity of a different conduct, and the heart is, in this case, appealed to by the most significant of all arguments, the attainment of its own happiness.

But how weak are all the motives, and how inactive the principles of natural religion! The sense of right and wrong places, indeed, our duty before us, but by no means affords us the power of pursuing it; and even the miseries of a mind that is inflamed by vice are generally insufficient to reclaim it.

It may not, however, be inexpedient to expatiate on that wretchedness which is the portion of guilt; since, though

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SERMON XIX. 123

the guilty may be but little affected by a representation of their own unhappy state, the innocent may, at least, be encouraged to hold fast their integrity, when they behold the distresses that are inseparable from wickedness.

That consciousness of its own immortality, which is implanted in every human mind, unavoidably leads it forward to the contemplation of futurity. On the reflections, which this contemplation produces, depends much of our pleasure, or pain. The good man, from a sense of the divine favour, cannot consider it without satisfaction and hope; the wicked, from a contrary conviction, cannot think of it without misery.

He

He whose hopes are not in God, who has lived in idle negligence, or in open violation of his laws, must, for the same reason that makes the good man rejoice, dread the events of life and death. When he calmly reflects, (and reflection will sometimes interfere) he can find nothing in his past life that can recommend him to the favour of that Power, who delights in goodness, and is a rewarder of the just. — Deprived then of that favour, what shall he do? or how shall he look forward to the dismal prospect that lies before him? How shall he support the thought of being excluded for ever from the presence of that Being, who has promised eternal happiness to his servants?

Shall

Shall he be capable of entertaining such a thought without terror and anguish?

Miserable is the condition of wickedness even in this life. Gaiety and dissipation may occasionally banish thought, and produce some intervals of ease or mirth, but the flighty scene will quickly disappear, and remorse and distraction renew their assaults. The voice of flattery may for a while sooth the breast with false hope, and paint delightful scenes and agreeable prospects; but the amusive dream will vanish in a moment, and reason and reflection condemn the folly of attention.

Happy, indeed, would it be, could the repeated attacks of these friendly monitors at length disengage us from

our miserable attachments — at length persuade us to seek our happiness in the paths of religious peace: but such is the obstinacy of depraved inclinations, that the vicious man, though he may feel the disquietudes of conscience, seldom listens to it's dictates, or takes the proper means to reconcile it to his conduct.

To divert it, indeed, means are generally consulted, and expedients are sought to sooth it into rest; but the numbers of an unapproving conscience never last long. A thousand accidents concur to bring back reflection, and it is only suspended to acquire the greater force. To what miserable arts is the wicked man reduced in order to be reconciled to himself, and to stifle the efforts of that conviction, from which it is not

in

SERMON XIX. 127

in the power of the heart to set itself free! What a wretched expedient to return to the same practices his mind is now condemning, from whose tribunal he is labouring to escape!

Strange, indeed, is it that he who pretends merely to act from the suggestions of nature, and makes those a plea for the indulgence of every inclination, should not here listen to the natural friend of his bosom, whose kind endeavours are exerted to rescue him from ruin! Strange, that the habit of vice should be so insatiating, as still to keep its votaries attached to it, in spite of reason and of happiness on the one hand, and the diseases and disquietudes it produces on the other!

For though the sense of having forfeited the favour of that all powerful Being, on whom we depend, might alone be a sufficient cause of wretchedness, yet that is far from being the whole portion of misery that awaits the wicked.

The disorders that the body derives from intemperance, the fear of being detected in vice, or villainy, and of suffering either in loss of reputation, or of life; the vexations of frequent disappointments, which, to those whose only hopes are centered in this life, and who have no dependance on, or expectations from providence, must be very many and very great; and numberless causes of dissatisfaction besides contribute to enlarge the woes of wickedness,

S E R M O N XIX. 129

ness, and to take from the vicious man every prospect of rest.

Is this the portion of the guilty? Is this the life for which they forfeit heaven, and are these the delights and the pleasures of sin? Great God! can there be in creatures thou hast endowed with the power of reflection such folly as this? Doth not even the unreasoning animal consult, in the best manner he can, his own ease and happiness? But man is industrious to destroy both. He refuses the very means of peace and security, and pursues the obvious path to destruction and misery.

What can thus infatuate the mind, and make it regardless of the dictates

of conscience and of reason?—of conscience that would lead us into the way of salvation, and of reason that would point out the dangers we should avoid.

Can we be so much wrapt up in present objects, so careless of the future, as to neglect that which the next moment may refuse us the power to perform, and the omission of which, will be attended by the worst of consequences?

Can it be in the power of a world that hath deceived us as often as we have trusted it, to make us withdraw our hearts from, and forfeit our hopes to a better? Can we calmly meditate on the loss of eternal happiness, and pursue the paths of sin with security of heart? No: the prophet observes that the wicked

S E R M O N XIX. 131

enjoy not even this security, that they never know the happiness of a mind at ease, but are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt.

Astonishing it is that the tempest should not at last make them weary, and desirous of rest in some quiet harbour! Can the fair scenes of peace have no attraction? can the pleasing prospects of happiness fail to induce? Alas! they fail.—The eye refuses to look upon them, or beholds them at best with careless indifference. The wicked, though they have no peace, seldom take the right method to procure it, but continue in those very practices which already have destroyed their satisfaction. Is it

that they are afraid of applying to an offended God for pardon? or is it that they have yet some favourite sin which, in spite of all their misery, they cannot part with, and which that they may preserve they are content to risque every hope of futurity?

Should we reason thus in the affairs of this life, we should be deservedly marked for the most pitiable folly. Who would not forego a little present advantage for a large reversion? Who would not suffer a little inconvenience to avoid distress or ruin? Is it not better that one member, nay that two, or three should perish, than that the whole body should be destroyed?

What, then, remains but that the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous

righteous man his path, and that he turn unto the Lord, who will have mercy upon him, and to God that will abundantly pardon?

If yet he hope to taste of life without anguish, or to enjoy the light without bitterness of soul; if he would seek any serenity of mind, any peace of heart, while in this state of being; let him not delay to apply to him, who alone can give rest to the weary and the heavy-laden!

If he have any regard for the welfare of a future existence, if any hope of passing an immortal life in happiness, let him make use of the day, while it is called to-day, and, before the grave shall close it's everlasting doors

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upon him, let him seek by repentance what he has forfeited by vice.

Upon the whole, if we wish for peace or satisfaction in this life, let it be remembered that it is only to be found in the duties of religion.—Every other scheme will prove ineffectual—He who can have nothing to intitle him to the favour of God, must be uneasy with respect to his future situation; if, indeed, he believes in a future state.—Should he affect to disbelieve it, yet he cannot be happy, because no man can, at all times, be an infidel. The voice of reason and of conscience will occasionally interfere, and will stagger the resolution of the most determined obstinacy.

A man

S E R M O N XIX. 135

A man may, perhaps, live an atheist, but no man ever died one. We give credit to the interests of this world no longer than it flatters us with pleasure, or furnishes us with amusement; and when the prospect of these shall vanish, reason will assert her slighted authority, and will suggest it to us to seek a refuge where, hitherto, we had been unaccustomed to place it.

In these circumstances, of what shall the wicked avail himself? What agonies must he feel, when the soul labours under fear and apprehension, while the body languishes in pain and sickness? How will he blame his folly and presumption, his obstinacy and ingratitude, that have robbed him of the only hope

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that

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that could support him through the vale of death, or open any pleasing prospect to the allotments of eternity! How will he mourn over the ruins of his folly, when every sense is lost in terror and confusion, and every reflection terminates in despair!

Such is the melancholy fate of the wicked, whose life is misery, and whose death is distraction!

Let us, my friends, as we know these things, avail ourselves of the knowledge. Let us secure the favour of God, and life or death shall alike bring us happiness.

“Mark the perfect man, and behold
“the upright, for the end of that man
“is peace.”

SERMON XX.

The Propriety of a reverent
and attentive Deportment
in the House of God.

ECCLES. V. I.

*Keep thy foot when thou goest into the
house of God, and be more ready to
hear, than to offer the sacrifice of fools;
for they consider not that they do evil.*

HOW dreadful is this place! surely
this is none other than the house of
God, this is the gate of heaven—said the
ravisht

ravished Patriarch, when he awoke from a vision, in which he had beheld the divine Presence. Nothing can be greater, or more solemn than this ejaculation. How awful, says he, is this wild and uncultivated desert, where, destitute of domestic conveniences, I reposed my head on a pillow of stones!—yet how venerable even is this place, since it hath been consecrated by the appearance of the immortal God!

The sense of the divine Presence, either where the Almighty had disclosed himself in visions to his servants, or in those places of public worship, where he was supposed more immediately to be, was entertained by the patriarchs and the prophets of old, with the most reverential awe.

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S E R M O N XX. 139

The house of God was, moreover, their delight; and they knew no happiness equal to that of having a free and frequent resort to it: infomuch that when the holy Psalmist was under the greatest personal distresses——when his children rebelled; when his friends deserted, and his enemies reviled him, he felt no distress so deeply as his banishment from the house of God.

“ My soul longeth, says he, yea even

“ fainteth for the courts of the Lord:

“ my heart and my flesh cry out for the

“ living God.

“ O then send out thy light and thy

“ truth, let them lead me, let them

“ guide me unto thy holy hill, and to

“ thy tabernacle!

“ Then

“Then will I go unto the altar of
 “God, unto God, my exceeding joy;
 “yea upon the harp will I praise thee,
 “O God! my God!”

There is a remarkable passage in the prophet Daniel, in which he implores heaven for the rebuilding of the fallen sanctuary.

“Cause thy face to shine upon thy
 “sanctuary, that is desolate.

“Thy servants take pleasure in her
 “stones, and favour the dust thereof.”

They revered the *very ruins* of what had once been the house of God; and *loved even the gates of Sion more than all the dwellings of Babylon.*

Nothing,

Nothing, indeed, could be more magnificent than the ideas which the ancient people of God had of their places of worship. They believed that the divine Presence was attended by multitudes of angels, and exalted beings, which, though invisible, joined in the worship of the Almighty. Thus when *Agrippa* dissuades the Jews from rebelling against the Romans, he calls to witness their holy temple, and the angels. *

But this opinion was not peculiar to the Jews only, it was received likewise by the Christians, as appears from various passages in the writings of the Fathers. † And Saint Paul has confirmed

* Joseph. de Bell. Jud. lib. ii. c. 16.

† For this opinion, vid. Orig. cont. Cels. lib. viii. p. 420.—Procop.—Chrysost. Hom. 36. in 1 Cor. et Hom. 24. in Act. Apost.—Basil. Liturg. &c.

the matter, where he observes that the women ought, in decency, to have their heads covered, *because of the angels*. I might observe too, that a prelate near our own times, distinguished for his evangelical piety, was of the same opinion†, did I not consider this part of my subject rather as matter of curiosity than of use.

I. What I have here principally to insist upon, is the propriety of a reverent and attentive deportment in the house of God.

There is something so solemn, so great and affecting in the appearance of a congregation uniting in the worship of the almighty Providence, that one should

† Bp. Taylor. Great Exemplar. p. 175.

S E R M O N XX. 143

think the awfulness of the scene itself might impress the mind with that religious veneration, which the nature of the duty, when considered, must inspire.

But it appears that the duty itself stands in need of consideration; and let us, therefore, consider it as we ought. —In the first place, what is the occasion of our assembling here? Do we come merely to meet our friends or acquaintance? Was it our errand to censure the dress or appearance of our neighbours? Or was it to exhibit our own persons to the eye of public curiosity and respect? —Were these, or any of these the purpose of this assembly? —Every man, for himself, will answer in the negative.

But what, then, I ask, was the design of this meeting? The answer, you would make, is obvious—The public worship of Almighty God:—this is a most important purpose indeed; the first and greatest duty of a rational creature. —

But, is it possible that what you tell us should be the case? Is the Almighty to be worshipped by levity and impertinence? Come you into his courts to indulge your curiosity, your malignity, or your indolence? Is this really the temple of God, or is it the temple of idleness?—where we may yet indulge a *little slumber, a little sleep, a little folding of the arms!* Is this then a place of divine worship, or is it not rather sacred to impertinent curiosity?—a place convenient for making censorious remarks,

to gaze about us with stupid impudence, and to sit down contented if we see a foible in our neighbour.

If such was our business, or if such be our behaviour, we come, indeed, as the royal Preacher says, *to offer the sacrifice of fools*: for nothing can be a more flagrant proof of folly, than to act contrary to all decency and propriety.—

And surely to bring the airs of levity and vanity, to come with a censorious, an indolent, or a trifling spirit, into a place set apart for divine worship, is not only in the last degree indecent and improper, but must be attended with no inferior degree of guilt.

II. For, in whose presence is it that we thus behave? Is it before an earthly

VOL. II. L prince?

prince?—No—In such a case we should be careful not to give offence by a trifling levity, or an idle inattention.—It is not in the courts of an earthly prince that we should thus demean ourselves;—but—it is in *the Lord's house, even in the courts of the house of our God*—it is in the presence of that great, and ever adorable Being, whose eye is over all his works;—of that infinite, and amazing Power, at whose command these stupendous worlds were created—these worlds, and *all that move therein.*

In whose presence is it, I say, that we thus behave? Is it only before mortal beings, creatures that are frail and dependent like ourselves? No—if we assembled in the name, and for the worship

XX
S E R M O N XX.

147

of God, that is not the case: for, has he not promised that *wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, there will HE be in the midst of them.*

It is, therefore, confessedly, in the presence of God himself that we assemble to worship him. Were it otherwise, what would our worship be? would not *that* too be *the sacrifice of fools*? Were there no eye, no ear attentive to our devotions, would they not be absurd? would they not be unworthy of a rational being?

But if, as we trust, and as we know, there is a Power that attends both to our devotions, and to our whole conduct— if, as we may reasonably believe, God is more particularly present in the places

of public worship,—shall we, on these most important occasions, bring with us the foibles of our lighter moments? Shall we be idle or inattentive, censorious or impertinent? Believe me, negligence, mere negligence would here be rashness, and levity would be the most audacious presumption.

How reproachful must it appear to a Christian congregation even to suppose that such admonitions as these could be necessary! to an assembly of Pagans they would not have been so. “We enter the temples of the gods,” says one of their philosophers*, “with the utmost order and gravity; when we

* Sen. Nat. Quæst. lib. vii. c. 30.

“approach

XX WOMEN
S E R M O N XX. 149

“approach to sacrifice, we cast our
“ eyes downward, in token of submis-
“ sion, and observe every other circum-
“ stance that can be expressive of mo-
“ desty.”—Another of their writers*,
who bears the most respectable name in
all the heathen antiquity, “would have
“ that person punished with death who
“ should offend in the public worship
“ of the Gods,”

III. It is probable that the ancient
Jews, from the great reverence they
had for their temples and their worship,
were not guilty of all those follies dur-
ing divine service for which Christians
are now so justly reprehensible. The
principal fault that the preacher seems

* Plato de Legib. lib. x. sub fin.

to charge them with is want of attention.
Be more ready to hear, says he, than to offer the sacrifice of fools. “When ye
 “come into the house of God for in-
 “struction, to hear his word read, and
 “explained, what means your negli-
 “gence and inattention? It is not so
 “much worth your while to observe
 “the ceremonial, as to learn the moral
 “part of the law: for God *will have*
 “*mercy rather than sacrifice.* Be, there-
 “fore, *more ready to hear.*”

Is it possible that we should assemble
 for the public worship of God, and at
 the same time refuse our attention ei-
 ther to his written word, to comments
 upon it, or to doctrines derived from it?
 Would not this be a species of mock-
 worship?

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151

worship? Could we hope to pay our court to any earthly monarch, while we denied our attention to those laws or customs, those rules or manners which he had appointed his ministers to lay before us? And yet during our presence in the courts of God's house how very apt are we to be inattentive!—inattentive, not only to the divine word, and to the illustration of that word, but to the very sense and signification of those prayers and praises, which we solemnly utter with our lips!

How often are our thoughts wandering, while our voices are lifted *up unto the Lord!* How many unmeaning sentences!—how many expressions, of which we have no idea, do we *part with* in

the ordinary course of our devotions !—
 Yet surely these prayers shall ascend in
 vain, and bring down no blessing on the
 head of him that uttereth them. While
 we are but the mere channel of words,—
 while our organs are made to convey
 expressions to which we affix no mean-
 ing, what do we make of ourselves more
 than machines ? Or, as St. Paul has it,
 what are we better than *sounding brass*,
 or than *tinkling cymbals* ?

One should think that the sense of our
 native dignity, the dignity of a reason-
 able being, might rouse us from such an
 unmanly, such an irrational indolence.
 What ! Has God given me these facul-
 ties of sense and intelligence, these powers
 of conception and apprehension, and
 shall

shall I degrade my reasonable nature by uttering sounds, like some mimic bird, which are attended with no meaning?

But—when I address myself to that Being, who gave me this sense, this power of reason and reflection— shall I then make no use of them? Shall the Giver of these good gifts be the only one in whose service I neglect to employ them? Is it possible that I should be so stupid, or so ungrateful?—Though nothing can be more to the purpose than such enquiries as these, perhaps there are no enquiries whatever that are so seldom made: and this, I take it, is, in a great measure, owing to want of consideration.

IV. *We consider not that we do evil.*
The human mind is so volatile and
so

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so various; and our thoughts are so accustomed to proceed from one object to another through the chain of ideas, that it requires the strictest attention and resolution to keep them fixed on the same subject for any considerable time. This I observe, not by way of excuse or palliation of the faults I have already mentioned, but that when you know, or when you consider, (for it could not be unknown to you) how apt the thoughts are to wander, you should by a stricter attention, and a more zealous care, call them home to the duties of divine worship.

It is but a weak apology for a being that is capable of thought and reflection, to say that he was led into error by want of consideration. For what purpose, think

SERMON XX. 155

think you, did God give us these faculties, but that we should employ them in his service? And shall they then lie dormant? Shall they then only be more particularly useless when we professedly meet to serve him?

When our thoughts should be employed on his favours and on his mercies—when they should offer up those prayers, that ought to proceed both from the spirit and the understanding; or while they should be meditating on the human duties, or the divine promises, as either may happen to be the subject of the preacher, shall they meanly return to their secular employments, and go, *some to their farm, and others to their merchandize.*

In consideration. For what purpose think

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In one word, my friends, let us take the method of that prince who was well acquainted with the human heart, and knew how to govern it; let us endeavour to *set God always before us*. Without this awakening sense of the divine presence, our assembling here will only be to *offer the sacrifice of fools: our preaching will be vain, and your hearing will be vain also.*

If the least change of heaven can affect us, if the final sentence of the Judge of the world deserve our care; if it may concern us to know why God accepts, why he rejects his creatures, the import of these words should be well weighed.

Our

XXI
S E R M O N

The religious and moral Necessity of charitable Contributions.

MATTH. XXV. 45.

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

IF the last charge of heaven can affect us; if the final sentence of the judge of the world deserve our care; if it may concern us to know why God accepts, why he rejects his creatures, the import of these words should be well weighed.

Our

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Our Saviour, describing the last judgment, has given us this account of the proceedings of that great day.

“ When the Son of man, says he,
“ shall come in his glory, and all the
“ holy angels with him, then shall he
“ sit upon the throne of his glory;

“ And before him shall be gathered
“ all nations;

“ And he shall separate them one
“ from another, the good on his right
“ hand, and the wicked on his left.

“ Then shall he say to those on his
“ right hand; Come, ye blessed of my
“ Father, inherit the kingdom prepared
“ for you from the beginning of the
“ world.”

And

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And this is the cause why he pronounces them worthy of his acceptance:

“ I was an hungered, says he, and
“ ye gave me meat; thirsty and ye gave
“ me drink; I was a stranger and ye
“ took me in; naked and ye clothed
“ me; I was sick and ye visited me;
“ in prison and ye came unto me.”

When the righteous shall disown the remembrance of these kind offices, and modestly refuse the acknowledgment to which they think themselves not entitled—then shall he reply,

“ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto
“ one of the least of these my brethren,
“ ye have done it unto me.”

When

When the wicked stand arraigned for the neglect of those duties which the righteous had discharged, the sense of guilt leads them to seek an evasion in the same answer which the candour of the just made use of to disclaim a merit they could not apply.

For, “when, say they, saw we thee
 “an hungered and fed thee not, or
 “thirsty and gave thee no drink?
 “When saw we thee a stranger and
 “took thee not in, or naked and
 “clothed thee not? Sick, or in prison,
 “and visited thee not?”

Then shall he answer,—

“Inasmuch as ye did it not to one
 “of the least of these, ye did it not
 “to me.”

S E R M O N XXI. 161

In the progress of this discourse, I shall consider,

I. The nature and objects of charity, as described by our Saviour.

II. The moral reasonableness of that duty.

III. The absolute necessity of it, in compliance with the divine commands; and,

IV. Draw such reflections from the whole as may best excite us to the due discharge of it.

I. I am to consider the nature and objects of charity, as described by our Saviour. Charity is not, nor ought to be, confined to any sect or party of men.

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M

When

When the judge of the world, addressing himself to the righteous, says, *Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren*, all nations are before him, and are universally included in that title.

The particular objects, mentioned in the context, are the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and the naked, the sick and the prisoner.

Though all the circumstances of human misery and misfortune are not here enumerated, they are, most of them, implied.

Those conveniencies which fortune can supply will find their proper objects

in

SERMON XXI. 163

in the hungry and the naked; and none are more intitled to the kind offices of humanity than the sick and the prisoner.

They who through misfortunes, or the various disadvantages of life, are become destitute of the common necessities of nature, are certainly entitled to the assistance of those, who, perhaps, have been enriched by the same inconstant hand of chance that has reduced these to depend on their relief; if it be proper to call that the hand of chance, which may, possibly, in some cases, be nothing else but the wise dispensation of providence, that places these objects before us for the exercise of virtue.

Shall I then see my brother in distress without giving him that assistance which

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heaven has placed in my power? How shall I hope for the continued bounty and blessing of God, if I deal not my bread to the hungry? How shall I claim the merits of my Redeemer's mediation, a charity which must be extended to me, if I neglect his most material precepts, and refuse my raiment to defend the naked? The hungry and the naked are the work of his hands, and have an equal right to human conveniences with myself.

Those who are in sickness and pain, who cannot taste the pleasures of life for anguish, who have their bed in darkness, and their pillow on the thorn, are real objects of pity and consolation.

To

To visit the sick, and to give them the little comfort we can administer, is an indispensable duty: And though the kind offers of condoling pity be unable to stay the feeble knees, or support the drooping head——yet is it not entirely useless; for, besides that in offering our compassion we discharge a duty incumbent on humanity, it is not altogether vain with respect to the object. The wretched, though incapable of the pleasures of society, are pleased to find themselves not neglected in their misery; and it is some alleviation to pain, to find an ear that will attend to, and a heart that will pity its complaints.

The unhappy objects who have lost both their liberty and their fortunes, who, after encountering the accidents of

business, and the difficulties of poverty, at last find a retreat in the solitary horrors of a prison, and are *fast bound in misery and iron*, are indeed pitiable, for their condition is wretched. To visit and relieve these unhappy creatures is a charity truly meritorious.

To be excluded the society of mankind, not to mention the want of comfortable conveniencies, is a sad condition of being, and in itself sufficiently miserable.

Contrary to the condition of the prisoner, but not much inferior in distress, is that of him to whom our judge gives the name of a stranger.

“I was a stranger, and ye took me
not in.”

Under

Under this denomination are included all who have no immediate residence in life; who wander up and down in solitary places, and have found no city to dwell in. To lend these an occasional defence from the inclemency of cold, and the pain of hunger, to help the weary on their way; to be given to hospitality, and to entertain strangers, is not surely too great a task for christian humanity.

Such is the nature, and such are the objects of charity mentioned by our Saviour.

Give me leave, in the next place, to consider the moral reasonableness of that duty.

II. No man is made for himself, but for the whole. Every individual is as a

link in the great chain of society, where all are knit together, and mutually dependent. The animating and connecting principle is self-love, which seeks it's own good in that of it's fellow creatures. If this principle be wrong directed; if we, through a false conclusion, refuse to assist any member of our species whose necessities demand relief, we neglect the import of moral rectitude and the fitness of things, as well as break through the strongest bond of community, which is mutual support. But the reasonableness of charity, needs not to be proved by abstracted speculations, it's intrinsic excellence sufficiently recommends it.

“To contribute freely to worthy and charitable designs is a great and infallible

SERMON XXI. 169

fallible argument of a benevolent
 mind: A mind that has honourable
 thoughts of providence; that relies
 upon it; and is secure and unconcerned
 about the events of this life.

Such a person seems to understand
 the true use of this world, and to
 have no more than a just value for it.
 He will not be governed and made a
 slave by his fortune, but is resolved
 to make use of it for the purposes to
 which it was given, and chuses rather
 to live charitably than to die rich.

He that forgets not to do good, and
 communicate, gives us a fair assurance
 that his conversation is in heaven;
 that he has made a higher choice, and

is

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“is in pursuit of nobler objects than
 “are to be met with here; for, if he
 “had no further aim than the views of
 “temporal happiness, if his thoughts
 “were only confined to this world, we
 “should have reason to believe, that he
 “would not part so freely with it.”

There is no stronger proof of the internal excellence of charity, than that admiration it infallibly draws after it, when it appears in low and unwealthy characters.—When the abilities of the giver are small! when he has nothing to depend on but what the hand of labour has procured him, and lives successively by the industry of the day!

“When, as St. Paul testifies of the
 “Macedonians, men are willing not
 “only

“only to their power, but beyond it,
 “and, like the widow in the gospel,
 “cast, as it were, their whole living
 “into the treasury of the poor, this is
 “an undeniable, and a glorious evidence
 “of the benevolence and devotion of
 “their temper, that they have a worthy
 “apprehension of God, and are gene-
 “rously inclined towards their fellow-
 “creatures.”

Besides the moral necessity and excel-
 lence of charity, the reasonableness of it
 is probable in that it is consistent with the
 dignity of human nature.

It is a *god-like* thing to relieve the ne-
 cessities of the wretched, and to imitate
 the noblest attribute of heaven in sup-
 porting the poor and defenceless.

“The

“The charitable person, when his
 “fortune bears any proportion to the
 “largeness of his mind, is the great and
 “universal remedy against the calamities
 “of life: He is a father to the father-
 “less, eyes to the blind, and feet to the
 “lame; he is liberty to the captive;
 “and, if not health, yet ease and re-
 “freshment to the sick.”

To dry the tears of want, and to sooth
 the anguish of pain; to cheer desponding
 grief, and to make the mind of necessity
 easy, and resigned, must be the highest
 rational satisfaction that the mind of man
 can be capable of.

“What a heavenly pleasure is con-
 “ceived in beholding a poor object
 “transported with joy on receiving a li-
 “beral

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“beral alms from the hand, or refresh-
 “ment from the table of another! How
 “delightful is it to abate, if not extin-
 “guish the misery of one of our own
 “species, and to communicate pleasure
 “at so cheap a rate! To have the con-
 “scious satisfaction, and assurance, that
 “our minds are generous and humane;
 “that the soul is untainted by covetous-
 “ness, and envy, and consequently free
 “from the disturbance of those detest-
 “able passions, gives both dignity and
 “happiness to human nature.”

By this we have the sublime liberty to
 conclude that we are, in some measure,
 of a temper resembling that of the Author
 of our being, and that we shall meet
 his approbation in the rewards of im-
 mortality.

SERMON XXII.

The religious and moral Necessity of charitable Contributions.

MATTH. XXV. 45.

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

THE nature and objects of charity, as described by our Saviour, and the reasonableness of that duty, upon moral principles, having been already considered, I shall now proceed to shew,

III. The absolute necessity of it, in compliance with the divine commands.

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The eternal Providence, wise in all his dispensations, and leaving over all his works a wide field for the practice of moral virtue, has permitted a variety of circumstances and conditions in human life, as well for that necessary subordination in the government of society, as to lay open the virtue of resignation to the poor, and that of beneficence to the wealthy.

As a great part of moral virtue consists in this beneficence, man would have had little to do as a social creature, had an equality of conditions rendered charity unnecessary.

But then it must be remembered, that as providence has rendered this virtue universally practicable, he has likewise made

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made the practice of it an indispensable duty.—Consistently with his unerring wisdom and benevolence, he has not left the support of the poor to the voluntary exertion of a virtue, founded only on choice, or on natural principles; but has expressly charged *the rich in this world* that they should be *ready to distribute, and willing to communicate.*

It is, indeed, an honourable commission that they have from the Almighty, to give *his household their portion of meat*; but they should reflect that as the trust is honourable and weighty, they ought to perform it with a proportionable fidelity, and that *it is required in a steward that he be found faithful.*

agreed T

21

1. Few,

S E R M O N XXII. 127

Few, perhaps, of those who enjoy the luxury of affluence can boast superior merit; they ought not, therefore, to look upon themselves as entitled to the comforts of plenty exclusive of their fellow-creatures, but to consider that *the poor are the Lord's, and so is the earth, and the fulness thereof.*

This consideration ought to have it's due effect, with regard to the duty of charity, were it enjoined by no particular commands in the sacred writings. But scarce any author there, from the Founder of Christianity, to the lowest prophet, or apostle, has left this duty unconsidered; scarce any but has given us some directions about the discharge of it, proved it's necessity, or displayed it's excellence.

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N

Though

Though the Christian doctrine explains it better, and enjoins it more strongly, yet was it not unknown in the Mosaic dispensation. So great was, even then, the reputation of charity, that the Jews made a parade of performing it, and sounded a trumpet to summon the poor to their alms.

This method, indeed, of relieving the necessitous, was not so much the consequence of a charitable disposition as of despicable vanity, and deserved no other name; but it is, nevertheless, a sufficient evidence how reputable and how honourable this virtue was accounted.

Nor does this only prove to us the credit of charity with respect to human opinion, as a virtue only morally good, exclusive

SERMON XXII. 179

exclusive of any religious injunction: They knew it to be a duty enjoined by, and the discharge of it acceptable to God. Thus we hear the Pharisee, when enumerating his virtues, and making a merit of his piety, declaring that he gave *alms twice a week.*

That his prayer was rejected, and the wretched Publican preferred before him, is no argument that the virtue of charity was not acceptable. His was not charity but insolence, not humanity but pride. Nor is it a wonder that his address was not received by that Being who is the searcher of hearts, and who judges not from the action but from the principle.

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If we consult the history of our blessed Redeemer, we shall find him, on many occasions, beside this mentioned, describing and enjoining the duty of charity; so frequently and so strongly does he inculcate it that it may be called the very essence of christianity, and it's cardinal virtue: Nor can there be any impropriety in that assertion; for it is the sum of religion, and may be rightly defined the love of God, and of our neighbour.

He who is destitute of this love, who acts not from this principle, whatever may be his pretensions to religion, or virtue, wants the essence of both.

We have many descriptions of this duty both by the prophet and apostles,

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as well as by our Saviour, but the best description is his life.

If we pursue him through the whole scene of his terrestrial existence, we shall find that to go about doing good was his invariable business. To comfort the afflicted, and to feed the hungry; to restore the sick to health, and the blind to sight; to make the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dumb speak, were the exercises he delighted in, and the continued actions of the day.

This was the life whose merits intitle us to heaven, and which is proposed the pattern of our imitation.

Hence appears the absolute necessity of Christian charity; for should we

neglect those precepts which the captain of our salvation has so strongly enjoined, how shall we hope for his favour! how shall we plead for acceptance by the merits of that life, whose example we have not profited by—which we thought not worth our imitation!

To add to the force of this argument, I might here quote the several texts of scripture wherein God has expressly commanded the duty of charity. But what has already been said will, I hope, be sufficient to convince you as well of the nature and reasonableness, as the absolute necessity of it.

IV. I shall only now, therefore, draw such reflections from the whole, as may best excite us to the due discharge of it.

As

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As the great end of society is mutual assistance and support, if through iniquitous selfishness, we refuse that assistance to others, which, in the possible chance of things, we ourselves might have stood in need of, we transgress the laws of nature, and the dictates of reason.

The great maxim of moral life is "to do to others as we would have others do to us." But if we neglect the complaints of misery which we could comfort, or the cries of distress we can possibly relieve; do we not resist the voice of nature and of reason, supposing the injunctions of religion entirely out of the question?

As man is formed for society, he is naturally a benevolent Being, ready to

rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep, kindly interests himself in the welfare, and wishes the prosperity of his fellow-creatures. — That this is more particularly the genius of this nation, the many public charities established within these few years sufficiently testify. These, let us hope, may cover a multitude of our national crimes. — Would to heaven there were not such a multitude to cover! — These are noble instances of that charming spirit of benevolence which is inspired by virtue, by piety, and wisdom!

Indeed, he who, in the midst of luxury and affluence, can behold his fellow-creatures ready to perish with want, deserves

serves not the name of a human being. What can justify the man who gives to a tribe of useless domestics, or creatures that have no further end than to contribute to his amusements, that bread which the laborious hind has procured him, while he, perhaps, through want of a sufficiency of it, pines in weakness, or languishes to death.

What numbers of poor, whose industry is ineffectual, would the superfluity of affluence support!

How many are rendered incapable of labour by sickness, or accidents, or the infirmity of age, who cannot be received into public hospitals, and who get, it is to be feared, little relief from public contributions!

How

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How many starve in unseen solitudes, scattered up and down over wilds and deserts, where the hand of kindness was never extended, which the eye of benevolence never saw!

Though we are not obliged to imbitter life by constantly partaking of, or contemplating the miseries of our species, yet it is our duty to hear the complaints of distress, and to relieve necessity on all possible occasions.

We are assured that we are by such means laying up for ourselves infinite happiness in a future existence: For we are told, that *he who giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord.*

How ought the rich in this world to rejoice that they have it in their power

to

S E R M O N XXII. 187

to invest their possessions in the security of heaven! Can there be any greater joy to a rational creature than this, that he can make the frail fortunes of this life last beyond the grave?

This is effectually to lay up treasure in a repository free from the inroads of the robber, and the rust of time!

Riches thus applied are, indeed, a blessing, nor shall their possessors find, if thus they dispose of them, any unhappy consequences from that declaration, that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The divine pleasure which a benevolent mind enjoys in relieving the necessities of the wretched is, all other considerations

derations apart, well worth the purchase. It is, as it were, a foretaste of that eternal joy which shall be the sure reward of those who have pity on the poor.

Since then nature and reason call upon us, since heaven and happiness invite us, since all laws moral and divine oblige us, let us perform this duty with chearfulness and alacrity; for *God loveth a chearful giver.*

Let us willingly impart of the good things of this life to the poor and needy. *The Lord careth for them. Freely we have received, let us freely give.*

Let us lay out the wealth we have in those uses, for which only it is serviceable,

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able, in clothing the naked, and feeding the hungry!

Let us not suppose that to be lost which is given to the poor; it is lent unto the Lord, and he will repay it.

That we may never be inattentive to the complaints of the necessitous, and never unheard, when we implore the mercies of heaven, may the God of all truth and kindness grant!

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S E R M O N XXIII.

The Happiness of determined
and conscious Integrity.

JOB xxvii. 6.

*My righteousness I hold fast, and will not
let it go; my heart shall not reproach
me so long as I live.*

“UNSTABLE as water, thou
shalt not excel,” said the dy-
ing Patriarch to one of his sons; and
the sentiment was, indeed, worthy of
that wisdom and prophetic knowledge
which

which the eastern Sages were supposed to have been, in a particular manner, favoured with, upon the approach of death.

In matters that relate to the common conduct of life, to the progress of art and the acquisition of knowledge, it is obvious both from reason and experience, that a wavering disposition can never attain either to excellence or to happiness.—With regard to religion, the conclusion is equally true. It is in vain for him who *putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back*, to hope for the rewards of that industrious perseverance, which, though it may, for a while, *go on it's way sorrowing*, shall, at the last, return with joy, and *bring it's sheaves with it*.—

He

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He only it is who *endureth to the end*, that shall be saved: — he who, through all the trying changes of this life, like the Patriarch, will not remove his integrity from him, who holdeth fast his righteousness, and will not let it go; — he only it is who may hope for the sublime and distinguished rewards of immortality.

Agreeably to the doctrine of the prophet, if the righteous man forsaketh his righteousness, and falleth into iniquity, *in his iniquity that he hath committed shall he die*. In due time we shall reap, if we faint not; but if we grow weary in well-doing; if we run not with patience and perseverance the race which is set before us; if we retire with the slothful, and

S E R M O N XXIII. 193

give up the prospect of the promised land, because the sons of Anak are to be grappled with, we may expect that our portion will be appointed with those who are finally accounted unprofitable servants.

The Christian warfare is, indeed, by no means to be considered as a trivial avocation. The sword and the shield must be grasped with unremitting vigilance; for many are the trials we must expect of our faith and patience, of our firmness and integrity.

The author of the text experienced these trials in a severe degree. His circumstances were such as make affliction always the most unwelcome: he had lived in dignity which no impertinence

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could disturb, in affluence above the apprehension of want, and in health and felicity uninterrupted by pain. His house was the resort of peace and friendship; the voice of the tabret was heard in his dwellings; his flocks filled the mountains, and brought forth thousands, and ten thousands in his streets; his table was clad with the riches of Arabia; and the incense of Sabea breathed on his altars.

Yet thus magnificently distinguished, thus surrounded with luxurious abundance, he was never betrayed into licentious folly, or inflexible arrogance. He did not look upon riches as the evidence of superior merit. He considered them as the gift of God, and forgot not to bless

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blest the hand of the giver. His charity and beneficence were large and diffusive in proportion to his circumstances. He was *eyes to the blind*, and *feet* was he *to the lame*. His words upheld *those that were falling*, and he strengthened *the feeble knees*.

Such was the conduct of this happy and distinguished eastern prince, when it drew upon him the envy of our common enemy, who, represented as conversing with God, would depreciate that integrity he could not corrupt. "For doth Job," says he, "fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blest the work of his hands,

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“and his substance is increased in the
“land. But put forth thine hand now;
“and touch all that he hath, and he will
“curse thee to thy face.”

In this the deceiver was deceived:
When the patriarch was told successively
that he was deprived of his sons, his ser-
vants, and even all his possessions, he
betrayed not one sign of impious resent-
ment, or censorious discontent. “The
“Lord gave,” says he, “and the Lord
“hath taken away, blessed be the name
“of the Lord.” When, to add to the
distress of poverty and loss of children, he
was deprived of health too, and doomed,
in all appearance, to languish out the
miserable remains of life in sickness and
in sorrow, he makes the same pious con-
clusion,

S E R M O N XXIII. 197

elusion,—“ Shall we receive good at the
“ hand of God, and shall we not receive
“ evil ?” When made to *possess months*
of vanity, and wearisome nights were ap-
pointed to him, still he possessed his soul
in patience, and declares in the con-
sciousness of determined integrity, “ my
“ righteousness I hold fast, and will not
“ let it go ; my heart shall not reproach
“ me so long as I live.”

Such is the resolution, which consi-
dered in the most comprehensive sense
of the words, should be formed by every
christian, and attended to through the
different circumstances of prosperity and
adversity. For to hold fast our righte-
ousness under the distresses of misfor-
tune, or afflictions of whatever kind,

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does not perhaps require greater fortitude or attention, than are necessary in the luxury of affluence, or the carelessness of ease.

When life looks gay around us, when every appetite is summoned to enjoyment, and every sense invited by it's object of gratification, we rarely give admittance to serious considerations. Every thought that might interrupt us in the pursuit of pleasure is industriously avoided, and the delightful present robs the future of our care.

Like the traveller, who, charmed with the flowery prospects that surround him, sits down forgetful of his destination, we are apt to lose ourselves in the pleasing scenes of this life, and, while

SERMON XXIII. 199

we enjoy the manna, we neglect the promised land.

To continue inflexible to the importunity of the passions, and to resist the solicitations of vice, when she bears before her the bewitching mask of pleasure, is a task to which we should summon all our fortitude. If every avenue is not watched with the utmost attention, and defended with the strongest guard, the vigilant enemy will have the advantage.

It would be superfluous to urge the necessity of this care. If we look around us, what numbers shall we see who, overcome by the intoxication of sensual enjoyments, have fallen from their integrity! — irresistibly borne away on the

200 S E R M O N XXIII.

licentious tide of pleasure, or amused with the dreams of delusive vanity!

To retain our innocence in such a general corruption, when the influence of example, and the tyranny of fashion reconcile us to the deformity of vice, and almost enforce compliance, requires no inferior degree of resolution.

The world is still so imperceptibly insinuating itself into our esteem, by a thousand stratagems which we cannot be aware of, that no circumspection can be too minute if we would still hold fast our righteousness, and keep our virtue untainted.

However, to take an impartial estimate of the most flattering pleasures that

this

this life can afford, — “to divest the
 “gay phantom of temporal happiness,
 “of that false lustre and ornament in
 “which the pride, the passions, and the
 “folies of men have drest her up,”
 would, perhaps, be the most effectual
 method to secure ourselves against her
 charms. Compared with the purity of
 virtue, and the valuable consideration of
 future happiness, all secular delights will
 appear but as the dust of the balance.

Thus necessary is the care of our
 righteousness, so far as it includes the
 virtues of temperance and sobriety, nor
 ought we to be less diligent in preserving
 it untainted in it's other significations,
 particularly as it implies moral justice.

To

To observe strict equity in all our connections, sincerity in our professions, and humanity and moderation in every circumstance of life, requires a constant guard over our passions, and an unremitting attention to the laws of rectitude.

Self love is so very active and industrious in our service, that unless we keep a constant eye upon her, and direct all her motions, she will be imperceptibly encroaching on the properties of others.

Pride, which is likewise the gift of nature, and necessary as self love, of which every man is possessed in a greater or a less degree, if not diligently attended to, and kept within it's proper sphere,

S E R M O N XXIII. 203

sphere, will betray us into censoriousness, insolence or cruelty.

Emulation, if not duly restrained, will in the consequence be envy; and even humanity itself insult with the kindness it confers.

Nothing is more true than that the heart may be deceived into vice by the appearance of virtue. Short sighted creatures as we are, we can seldom foresee to what bounds the most innocent pursuits, when indulged, may lead us; nor are we apprehensive through what different directions a quality apparently good may tend to wickedness.—It is necessary, therefore, that we should keep a strict guard over our conduct, and over the habit of our minds; that we should
examine

examine impartially the principles from which we act, and the tendency of the action; and that, under every circumstance, we should be cautious lest the prevalence of private passions should interfere with the practice of the social duties.

The necessity of this minute attention must be obvious to every man who has made the least acquaintance with his own heart, and who wishes that it may *not reproach him so long as he shall live.*

The last mentioned circumstance is, indeed, of all others the most desirable; for on the approbation of our own hearts depends all our quiet, all our happiness in this world.

He

S E R M O N XXIII. 205

He whose heart will not bear witness to the integrity of his conduct, must never know what it is to be truly at ease. Should the endeavours he uses to sooth and silence the remonstrances of his conscience, unfortunately for him, prove successful in that respect, yet he can never know that sensible, that home-felt pleasure which is the inseparable attendant of a heart that is pure.

Behold here the happiness of virtue in the most essential respect! When the glories of that felicity of which this world gave a promise, vanish away; when temporal hopes are gone, and distress and misfortune make their irresistible inroads, then it is that the conscious mind, secure in itself, and perfectly reconciled to it's

OWN

206 S E R M O N XXII.

own reflections, affords a support that is adequate to every transient evil.

This it was which sustained the afflicted patriarch under the greatest distresses that human nature could suffer. On this he always builds his repose, and refers for consolation to the integrity of his heart.

—His cruel and ill-judging friends would have advised him to forego every sentiment of that kind, and, in consideration of his afflictions, to have looked upon himself as the most abject of offenders. This advice might proceed from excess of piety, but it was certainly wrong, — for conscience is an unerring guide, and the heart has always a right to that satisfaction, which it's own approbation can give.

I can-

SERMON XXIII. 207

I cannot here forbear to observe that there is, even now, a sect of men who, in this respect, are not unlike to Job's friends.—I mean those unhappy and deluded people called Methodists.

These poor fanatics, who are, in general, profoundly ignorant, and who catch at some branch or part of a scriptural text, without being able to attend to the relation and meaning of the whole, are for ever depreciating human virtue, and the merit of moral goodness:—hence they do the utmost prejudice to the cause of religion, which is certainly founded on moral principles, while they deprive the virtuous man of that conscious happiness, which the integrity of his heart might afford him. They intirely destroy one of the motives to a good life, which

is

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is the sense of that pleasure it may yield ;
and for ever inculcating the wretched-
ness of human nature and human virtue,
they enlarge the empire of superstition by
opening all the gloomy avenues of self-
abasement and despair.

Thus, I say, these unhappy people
resemble the friends of Job, who wanted
to deprive him of his only remaining
consolation, the consciousness of his in-
tegrity ; but he wisely answered them,
“ My righteousness I hold fast, and will
“ not let it go ; my heart shall not re-
“ proach me so long as I live.”

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S E R M O N XXIV.

An Exhortation to Beneficence;
occasioned by the Bishop of
London's recommending the
Subject to his Clergy.

Preached at St. John's, Clerkenwell,

March 11, 1764.

GALAT. vi. 10.

Let us do good unto all men.

THIS is surely a precept of the last
importance, since it comes recom-
mended to us by every writer, whose pen
was charged with the commandments
of his God.

VOL. II.

P

Alas!

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Alas! that the precept itself should ever need to be so repeatedly enforced! that the best and most essential part of human virtue should require to be enjoined by so many fancies, to be inculcated by so many tongues! while the most iniquitous selfishness lays hold on the heart, and depraves those capacities which are derived from the eternal source of reason and benevolence!

What the Almighty originally intended man to be; the conduct that is suitable to the dignity of his nature, and the happiness of his condition, we may learn from the character of that amiable and exalted person, who took upon him the charge of our salvation.

In

S E R M O N XXIV. 211

In him we behold essential goodness, and invariable benevolence—a heart for ever actuated by social love; watching, with unwearied kindness, over the welfare of others, and promoting their happiness, with the tenderest assiduity.—*He went about*, says the evangelical writer, *doing good*. This was the continual employment of his life; with this view he visited every town in Judea, and, for the space of three successive years, made it his business to relieve the sufferings of mankind. Where he went, pain and sickness and infirmity fled before him.—He was, literally, that fan of righteousness which arose with HEALING in his wings, and the effects of natural evil were, for a while, suspended in that

happy region which had the honour to give him birth.

The effects of natural evil were suspended—nor was the divine benevolence less concerned to prevent, at the same time, the increase of moral evil. He seldom dismissed the sufferer, whom he had restored to health, without reminding him of his duty; and when he had made him whole, he bade him *sin no more*.—Into whatever village he went, he not only *healed their sick*, but *taught the people*; and pitied them, *as sheep not having a shepherd*.

Without honour himself; without being distinguished as a prophet in his own country; or amongst his friends; his beneficence invidiously misrepresent-

ed,

SERMON XXIV. 213

ed, and his miracles ascribed to the agency of devils,—under these circumstances, so mortifying to human weakness, he invariably persevered in the exercise of kindness, and was not *wearied in well doing*.

Behold him enter the cottage of humble poverty, to comfort an afflicted family, by restoring to their hopes some dear and valuable member! Behold the parent, in speechless anguish, watching the last feeble looks of her departing child! Where is the man of Nazareth to change this heart-breaking scene?

Where is he whose tenderness will comfort the parent; whose power can restore the child? He comes—the man of Nazareth approaches! his kind purpose is

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written in the benignity of his countenance—"Be comforted," saith he to the tender mourner, "thy child liveth."

See here, O Christians! the author of your religion, the pattern of your conduct! Ye cannot, indeed, imitate him in his miraculous powers—but in the motives of his miracles it is yours to imitate him—it is yours to adopt and cultivate that benevolence which was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and comfort to the mourner.

Like your gracious master, you can visit the sick, *the fatherless and the widow in their affliction*, and, like him, you can feed the hungry.

Need you by any external motives be excited to distribute your bread to the hungry?

SERMON XXIV. 215

hungry? Then turn your eyes upon your amiable Lord, and behold him industriously doing the same!

“Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: And I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.”

That divine benevolence which brought salvation to the soul, was not regardless of the wants of the body. That compassion which pitied and repaired the ruins of our nature; which brought us out of a state of darkness and servility into the light and liberty of the children of God, that large compassion extended

to the minuteft necessities of life.—Behold it here exerting itself in the support of a multitude that wanted bread!—Here was no unnecessary display of a miracle. This multitude was in a desert-place, and many of the people came from far: Probably too many of them were poor, and unable to buy themselves bread in the neighbouring villages; for such, in general, were the followers of Jesus.—It was charity, therefore—it was pure compassion that gave occasion to this miracle; and here too we ought to cherish the motive, though we cannot imitate the effect.

In one respect, however, we may retain something of the miracle; and (as in the case of the loaves and fishes) in distributing

SERMON XXIV. 217

distributing our possessions, we may find them increase. Possibly the increase may not in this case, more than in the other, be immediately visible; but upon the dissolution of the last great multitude, we shall perceive, that what would not, originally, have filled one basket, shall scarcely *then* be contained in seven.

To encourage a disposition that shall produce such an happy effect, let us contemplate our benevolent Master during the progress of this charitable miracle.

Possibly some such sentiments as these passed in his gracious mind upon that occasion.

“ Behold, in this lonely wilderness,
“ what a multitude of my brethren!

“ with

218 SERMON XXIV.

“ with concern and affection do I look
 “ upon them; for *they* are the work of
 “ my Father’s hand. He who made of
 “ one flesh all nations on the earth,
 “ meant them to be the aid and support
 “ of each other: To this end he or-
 “ dained the law of religion to consist
 “ in mutual benevolence—But, alas!
 “ how neglected that law, which, in-
 “ deed, it is now time for me to re-
 “ establish!

“ How like unto sheep, not having
 “ a shepherd, is this poor and ignorant
 “ multitude; that for a while forsaking
 “ a servile and precarious dependance
 “ on the wealthy, hath followed me, as
 “ poor as the poorest, into this barren
 “ and uncomfortable desert!

“ From

SERMON XXIV. 219

" From their ignorance, indeed, I
 " have endeavoured to set them free;
 " and have *taught them many things*;
 " but the bread of life is not, alone,
 " sufficient for them; they have now
 " been with me three days in the wil-
 " derness and have eaten nothing; and
 " I must not send them away hungry
 " lest they faint by the way: My gra-
 " cious Father will readily grant me a
 " supernatural supply, and I shall have
 " the happiness of dispensing his bounty
 " to his creatures."

Where is the cold heart that is not
 warmed to charity by a scene like this?
 where is the narrow spirit that is not en-
 larged by meditating on such a subject?
 Where is the selfish wretch that can be-
 hold

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hold his Saviour feeding the hungry, and dare to omit so necessary a duty?—That Saviour, on whose mediation he depends for everlasting happiness, by whose kind intercession alone he must hope for the favour of God—will he dare to withhold his hand, when he calleth upon him to relieve his brethren?

It is astonishing that those who profess to follow the principles and precepts of the gospel, and call themselves by the name of the Son of God, should need a moment's exhortation to charity. Know they not that this is the most essential precept of the Christian dispensation? Need they be informed that their Saviour, their Redeemer, the Judge of the world, has declared these to be the con-
ditions

ditions of his accepting them at the last day, viz. that they shall freely have contributed to the relief of the necessitous? They need not to be informed; would to God they needed not to be exhorted! But true it is that, however reasonable any duty may appear, or how strongly soever it may be enforced by the divine laws, the human mind will frequently be inattentive to it, and leave it among the objects that are known and disregarded.

Beneficence is in itself so noble a virtue, so distinguished by its peculiar greatness that one would think it impossible to consider without embracing it, or to contemplate without making it our own.

Yet

Yet all amiable, all engaging as charity appears, instead of being admired as an angel, she is avoided as a fiend. The reveries she promises are looked upon as flattering delusions, designed only to draw us into a present expence. We are not liberal enough to take her unportioned to our favour, and therefore we determine to deprecate her virtues. Her generosity we call profusion, and her benevolence weakness.

The cause of all this is the prepossession of the heart. Wealth is an object that brings present gratifications along with it; and how low, or how mean soever those gratifications may be, they prevail over the influence of greater, because distant hopes.

To

SERMON XXIV. 223

To overcome this false attachment, and mistaken choice, there is no better method than to reflect how vain and transitory is every temporal possession! How soon the imagined charms of riches vanish away, and leave the owner convinced that the privilege of food and raiment is all that they can boast! How delusive are those pleasures which fortune promises, and novelty for a while endears! and how certain that disgust and discontent, which attend the decline of a life whose only hopes repose on this world!

If truth could obtain admittance for such reflections as these, and if the mind could be persuaded to consider things in this light, it might not, perhaps, be difficult

ficult to recommend to it better hopes and more perfect enjoyments.

He who should be convinced of the insufficiency of wealth to obtain any lasting happiness in this world, might not be displeased to find that it was possible to invest it in the security of another—He who had vainly wearied himself in the pursuit of fugitive enjoyments, might be gratified by discovering the means of that permanent happiness which by experience he had found unattainable on earth.

Such are the prospects which charity brings along with her, and such is the happiness which she has the power to give.

He

He who hath contributed to feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked; who hath been a friend to the stranger, the sick and the prisoner, hath a moral right to hope for an interest with that Saviour, who has declared that he would accept these offices as done to himself.

Involved in this interest are the most exalted and magnificent hopes! Prospects that bring to sight the regions of eternal felicity; ages that glide away in intellectual joy and love; where the faculties spread and bloom for ever; stretching forward to the excellence of superior natures; unbroken by exercise, and unimpaired by time.

These, these are hopes which it is in the power of Beneficence to give. O ex-

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alted virtue! O glorious power! which if we exercise it in this scene of imperfection, shall lead us hereafter to an *innumerable company of saints and angels*; where we shall experience a greater and more perfect harmony of affections; where sympathy shall be warm without weakness; and where the reciprocations of love shall be more tender and more dear!

Does emulation warm us? Are we affected with a generous desire of excellence? Behold it here! To be charitable is to make approaches towards the nature of God—to do good, is to act like him.

IF

S E R M O N XXIV. 227

If it be impossible for human beings even to make approaches towards the divine nature; yet it must be their glory and their happiness to resemble, in disposition, the angelic powers—to imitate those exalted spirits, that leave their mansions of felicity to attend inferior creatures, nor deem it unequivalent to the enjoyments of heaven to relieve the conflicts of suffering virtue, and to rescue misery from the horrors of despair.

Those exalted spirits that rejoiced with the Father of everlasting mercies, when the foundations of the earth were laid!—that sung together for joy when, in kindness, he called forth this smiling creation, and appointed the sun to run

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his race—that exulted at the rising of the star in Jacob, and proclaimed BENEVOLENCE to the inhabitants of the earth!—Those distinguished beings, as their gracious master has told us, actuated by the spirit of invariable kindness, rejoice upon the repentance of a sinner; and many have believed, possibly, upon good foundations, that they frequently interpose their care for the preservation and happiness of the human race.

Led by the example of these glorious spirits, and obedient to the precepts of our God and our Redeemer, let us diligently embrace the Apostle's advice, and, as we have opportunity, do good unto all men.

Upon

S E R M O N XXIV. 229

Upon this occasion, when our Sovereign and our Diocesan have called upon us to exercise our beneficence in the relief of our poor brethren, let us not be inattentive to their benevolent exhortations, but exert those abilities which God hath given us, in promoting the happiness and comfort of his creatures.

A state of indigence very frequently becomes the lot of man, and, many times, from misfortune more than from misconduct. God only knows whether those, who now enjoy a comfortable subsistence, may not, through some unforeseen accident, become the objects of that charity which is this day solicited from them,

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Let it not, then, be in vain that it is solicited ; but let them do unto others, even as they would have others do unto them.

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